
ENVIRONMENTAL WORK IN RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN BELARUS «

Overview of
the situation and
recommendations
for development



Minsk, Belarus
2023

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Introduction

¹ [See the website of the President of the Republic of Belarus: \[Electronic resource\].](#) (Date of access: 01.11.2022).

² In the last two censuses of the population of Belarus in 2009 and 2019 there is no question of religious affiliation.

When discussing issues of ecological culture and environmental values in Belarus, it is necessary to take into account the role of religious organizations that influence the values and culture of the country's population. Understanding how the most numerous religious communities of the country relate to environmental issues, and seeing the level of their involvement in this topic, allows us to analyze in which areas of activity (for example, educational, parish, social, etc.) environmental topics are best represented, how communities interact with environmental organizations and the public, and assess the overall role of religion in solving environmental problems in Belarus.

This analytical review reflects the representation of the environmental agenda in the seven most numerous and active religious organizations in Belarus. According to official data¹, there are more than 1,700 communities of the Belarusian Orthodox Church in Belarus, about 500 communities of the Roman Catholic Church, more than 500 communities of Evangelical Christians, 281 communities of Evangelical Christian Baptists, three Evangelical Lutheran communities (officially representing the church in Belarus), more than 30 Jewish communities, more than 20 Muslim communities. As for the number of those who consider themselves to belong to one or another confession in Belarus, there is no exact official data². Therefore, the review will provide indicative figures.

The aim of the work was to explore the extent to which the selected religious communities of Belarus are involved in the environmental movement, to study their characteristics and wishes in working with environmental topics.

During the preparation of the review, personal meetings were held with representatives of religious communities, with priests, with deputy bishops, sometimes with heads of religious associations, thus, with those who reflect the opinion of large groups. When studying the environmental agenda in religious communities, the presence of official documents on environmental issues, the presence of this topic in the educational system,

the representation of the topic in the public space, examples of interaction with governmental agencies on environmental issues, and the implementation or participation in specific practical environmental initiatives or projects were taken into account.

The review presents an expert point of view and does not claim to be a comprehensive analysis, does not fully reflect the representation of the environmental agenda in the religious community of Belarus, but helps to find growth points and entry points in promoting this agenda in religious communities.

After reviewing each religious association, brief recommendations are given on how to start or develop an environmental movement in the described religious community. These recommendations are one of the outcomes of this review. They will be useful both for the communities themselves and for organizations and initiatives that would like to develop interaction with religious communities in the environmental field.

At the end of the review, the results will be summed up and some general thoughts will be expressed about the possibilities for developing environmental and nature conservation work in the religious communities of Belarus.

Environmental Agenda in the Belarusian Orthodox Church



³ [Religious communities in the Republic of Belarus \(as of January 1, 2023\)](#) [Electronic resource] // Commissioner for Religious Affairs and Nationalities. (Date of access: 15.01.2023).

As of January 1, 2023, there are 1,733 communities of the Belarusian Orthodox Church in Belarus³. According to various sources, about 4 million people consider themselves Orthodox.

Thanks to various environmental projects and initiatives, the Belarusian Orthodox Church occupies a leading position in terms of activity in the environmental sphere compared to other confessions and religions in Belarus, as well as in the Russian Orthodox Church throughout the post-Soviet space. In fact, the experience of the Belarusian Orthodox Church in environmental activities has become a pilot for the Russian Orthodox Church. In addition, over the past decade, church parishes in Belarus have become more open to environmental initiatives and more and more independent parish initiatives and small projects have begun to appear.

Given these aspects, the environmental agenda in the Belarusian Orthodox Church and recommendations should be covered more extensively and divided into separate paragraphs.

Official documents and regulations on environmental issues

The Belarusian Orthodox Church is part of the Russian Orthodox Church (Belarusian Exarchate). General official documents of the Russian Orthodox Church

are also valid for the Belarusian Orthodox Church, so in this section we will talk about the documents of the Russian Orthodox Church, which the Orthodox Church in Belarus is guided by.

In the Russian Orthodox Church, there are a number of official documents on environmental issues, thanks to which in Belarus, somewhere more, somewhere less actively, the environmental movement in the church developed. Such official documents of the Russian Orthodox Church can be considered: “Fundamentals of the social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” (XIII chapter “The Church and environmental problems”) (2000).⁴ “Foundations of the teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church on dignity, freedom and human rights” (III.5. “The implementation of human rights should not lead to environmental degradation

⁴ [Fundamentals of the social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church](#). [Electronic resource] // Official website of the Moscow Patriarchate. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

⁵ [Fundamentals of the teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church on dignity, freedom and human rights.](#) [Electronic resource] // Official website of the Moscow Patriarchate. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

⁶ [The position of the Russian Orthodox Church on topical environmental issues](#) [Electronic resource] // Official portal of the Belarusian Orthodox Church. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

⁷ [Methodological recommendations on the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in environmental protection.](#) [Electronic resource] // Official website of the Moscow Patriarchate. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

and depletion of natural resources”) (2008)⁵, “The position of the Russian Orthodox Church on topical environmental problems” (2013)⁶ and “Methodological recommendations on the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in environmental protection activities” (2015)⁷.

The last two documents can be called a continuation of the chapter on environmental problems from the Fundamentals of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church and a more detailed version of it. The “Position of the Russian Orthodox Church on Current Environmental Issues” is important since it gives the church leadership and communities a fairly clear vector for the development of church environmental activities and offers specific recommendations in various fields of activity. The theological dimension speaks of the need to develop theological research on the relationship between man and the created world in higher church institutions, as well as to consider environmental topics at church scientific and practical forums. Environmental education in the church, according to the document, is achieved through the involvement of clergy in the study of the foundations of ecology as a science and the laws of the functioning of the biosphere and through the introduction of the topic of Christian environmental ethics into church and secular educational programs. It also emphasizes the need to organize special church courses and educational programs that reveal the Orthodox vision of environmental issues for the student and scientific community. Ecological activity can be a component of pastoral, missionary, social and youth service. Within the framework of cooperation with the state and society on environmental issues, the church is open to participating in conferences and meetings with an environmental focus, implementing environmental projects, participating in the development, discussion and implementation of information, educational programs that have an environmental component.

“Methodological recommendations on the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in environmental activities”, focusing on the provisions of the “Position” that the environmental program can be singled out as a special area of diocesan and parish work, offer a detailed distribution of church environmental work on several levels. For example, *at the diocesan level*, the diocesan departments on environmental issues are managed by the ruling bishops, while the coordination of environmental activities at the diocesan level can be carried out by the chairman of the diocesan Department for Church and Society Relations or another person appointed by the ruling bishop. *At the level of the deanery*, the general organization, coordination and control of environmental activities, according to the recommendations, are carried out under the leadership of the dean. At this level, a deanery council on environmental issues can be created.

At the parish level, the general organization, coordination and control of environmental activities is the responsibility of the rector. The direct implementation of environmental work can be distributed among those responsible for youth, social, catechetical and missionary work.

It is valuable in the «Methodological recommendations» that at each level the tasks of those responsible for environmental work are prescribed.

These documents contributed to the development of environmental activities in the Belarusian Orthodox Church and strengthened the already existing agreements between the Belarusian Orthodox Church and state environmental institutions. Thus, in 2003, within the framework of the Agreement between the Republic of Belarus and the Belarusian Orthodox Church, a Cooperation Program was concluded between the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus and the Belarusian Orthodox Church on environmental issues. In 2015, a new cooperation program was signed with the Ministry of Natural Resources. In the same year, with the blessing of Metropolitan Pavel of Minsk and Zaslavje, a working group was established to implement the Program of Cooperation between the Belarusian Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus (No. 1-02/26 dated May 7, 2015).

Development of environmental activities in the Belarusian Orthodox Church

The beginning of the church and environmental activities of the Belarusian Orthodox Church can be considered small events

of both church and secular organizations to preserve the natural environment. One of the first initiators of church and environmental activities on the part of the Belarusian Orthodox Church was the International Public Organization “Christian Educational Center named after St. Methodius and Cyril (IPO CEC)⁸. The Christian Educational Center was established in 1996 under the chairmanship of the Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus, Metropolitan of Minsk and Sluck, Filaret. The activities of the Christian Educational Center in the environmental sphere were divided into education in the field of Christian attitude to creation and practical environmental actions involving Christians. Thus, since 2001, the Christian Educational Center has carried out a number of educational and practical environmental events.

An important event took place in 2001: from May 26 to May 31, with the blessing of Philaret, Metropolitan of Minsk and Sluck, Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus, the Christian Educational Center held the III Assembly of the European Christian Ecological

⁸ The International Public Association named after Saints Methodius and Cyril «Christian Educational Center» was reorganized in 2014. Unfortunately, the website with materials about the environmental activities of the center was closed.

⁹ In 1997, the 2nd European Ecumenical Assembly, held in the city of Graz (Austria), proposed the creation of a European environmentally oriented organization, which would include representatives of various Christian churches. Thus, in October 1998, the European Christian Ecological Network (ECEN) was founded at the Orthodox Academy in Vilemov (Czech Republic). The materials of the assembly held in Raubichi were not published.

¹⁰ Responsible for creation. Culture and Education in the Face of Environmental Challenges: XVII International Cyril and Methodius Readings: Reports of the Scientific and Practical Conference, May 26-28, 2011 - Minsk: BGATU, 2011. - 290 p.

¹¹ [Ecological department of the Grodno diocese](#) [Electronic resource] // Grodno diocese. Belarusian Orthodox Church. (Date of access: 06.01. 2023).

Network (ECEN)⁹ in Rawbichy. This was the first experience of Belarus in discussing the environmental topic at a conference organized by a church structure. After that, until recent years, the Christian Educational Center periodically organized conferences, in particular Cyril and Methodius readings, one of the topics of which was the responsibility of man for God's creation¹⁰.

Today, in the Belarusian Orthodox Church, only two out of 13 dioceses have special environmental departments: in Grodna and Brest. The environmental department at the Grodna diocesan administration is involved in organizing environmental summer camps for children, meetings of Orthodox youth¹¹.

The environmental department in the Brest diocese (appeared in 2015) includes an environmental component in activities with children and youth, takes part in environmental projects to organize environmental trails, and conducts bike rides¹².



Participants of the environmental gathering «Orthodox youth for sustainable development» (2022), organized by the environmental department of the Grodna diocese

¹² [Ecological department \[Electronic resource\] // Brest diocese. Belarusian Orthodox Church.](#)

¹³ [The official blog of the association of youth of the Belarusian Orthodox Church.](#) (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

¹⁴ [The structure of the program of the forum «Eternal Life» \[Electronic resource\] // Official portal of the Belarusian Orthodox Church.](#)

¹⁵ [Community of Orthodox Scouts VKontakte.](#) [Electronic resource].

An important role in the development of church and environmental activities was played by the Youth Association of the Belarusian Orthodox Church (OMBPTs)¹³. At one time, it was the OMBPC that was the main engine of environmental initiatives and activities in the Belarusian Orthodox Church. With the participation of Orthodox youth, garbage collection actions, ecological excursions, master classes, talks, annual seminars dedicated to the day of prayer for God's creation were held. Today, the Synodal Department for Youth Affairs of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, which is the legal successor of the OMBPTs, also regularly includes environmental topics in the program during youth rallies and meetings¹⁴.

The Children's and Youth Association of the Belarusian Orthodox Church "Orthodox Scouts of Belarus"¹⁵ has regularly held and continues to conduct various environmental events: garbage collection campaigns, spring cleaning campaigns, environmental seminars, hikes, and also include an environmental component in their educational programs.

OMBPTs Seminar
"Day of Prayer for God's
Creation", 2010



During classes
at the Green Scout School
event, Minsk, 2014



¹⁶ [«The interconfessional mission «Christian Social Service» in partnership with UNDP launched the project «Living Water - Cleaning Springs in Belarus»»](#) [Electronic resource] // Official portal of the Belarusian Orthodox Church. (Date of access : 06.01.2023).

¹⁷ [“Support for environmental management in church organizations”](#) [Electronic resource] // RSEO “Living partnership”. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

The interconfessional group “Christian Social Service” was also involved in environmental activities. For example, it implemented the project: “Living Water - Cleaning Springs in Belarus”. During 2012, they set and completed the task of cleaning and improving four springs under the patronage of church communities. Within the framework of the project, various environmental events were held in church parishes: environmental talks, trainings, a graffiti contest.

Since 2008, the Republican Social and Environmental Public Association «Living Partnership» has been implementing a project to support the environmental management system in church organizations¹⁷. It was an adaptation of the environmental work model of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia in Germany (Green Rooster campaign). On the part of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox parish of the Church of the Icon of the Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow” in Minsk and the House of Interchurch Communication “Kinonia”, owned by the Belarusian Orthodox Brotherhood of the Three Martyrs of Vilna (Belarusian Orthodox Church), took part in the project. As a result of the implementation of the environmental program, they received

Ecological campaign of the IPO CEC for garbage collection together with the Church of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Minsk



¹⁸ [House of interchurch communication "Kinonia". Environmental Declaration. \[Electronic resource\] \(Date of access: 12.01.2023\).](#)

a "White Stork" environmental certificate. It should be noted that as part of the implementation of the environmental management program, the House of Interchurch Communication "Kinonia" implemented various environmental projects: treatment facilities were built using a plant-soil filter, which made it possible to avoid frequent removal of sewage, save money and protect the environment; a solar collector was installed for heating water; fluorescent lamps were replaced with LEDs; environmental classes and seminars for people with disabilities were organized. All Kinonia projects were described in the Environmental Declaration of the House of Interchurch Communication "Kinonia"¹⁸.

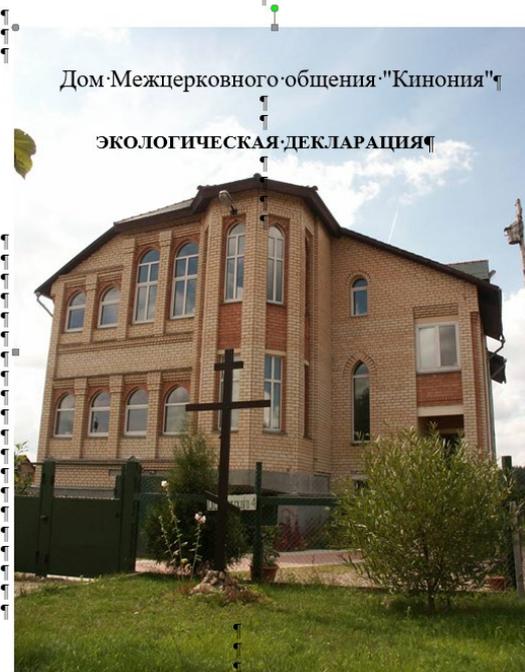
Thanks to such vigorous activity, the House of Interchurch Communication "Kinonia" at one time became a real demonstration environmental platform in Belarus and a platform for holding church and non-church environmental events.

The Kalozha Church in Grodno and the Liady Holy Annunciation Men's Monastery (Minsk region) also took part in

Title page of the "Kinonia" Environmental declaration



Solar collector for heating water, House of interchurch communication "Kinonia" in 2012



the environmental management project. As part of the project, the Kalozha Church held environmental educational events, organized an ecological living corner for the Sunday school. The monastery, in addition to educational environmental talks and lectures, installed an autonomous sewage system with a soil and vegetation platform.

It is important to note that the project on environmental management in church organizations was characterized by a systematic approach: the church communities, in addition to educational activities with parishioners and expert consultations, had to independently monitor the environmental life or policy of the church community at different levels (pastoral, economic). It was necessary to solve problems with waste management in the parish, monitor the consumption of electricity and water and reduce them through the introduction of new technologies and simple habits.

The activities of the Belarusian Orthodox Church in organizing ecological educational trails or corners on the territory of church parishes deserve special attention. Such projects have proven

During an environmental educational seminar as part of the implementation of the environmental management project, Kalozha Church in Grodna, 2015



Excursion for children along the ecological path "Bogino" at the parish house in the village of Bohina (Viciebsk region), 2019



to be an effective educational tool. The trails were created with the support of the Man and Creation program. In some cases, such projects have been implemented in cooperation with local authorities.

Here is a list of ecological trails and eco-corners that were organized jointly with the Belarusian Orthodox Church:

- ecological trail “Stone Hill” (Kamennaya Gorka), located in the parish in honor of St. Nicholas of Japan in Minsk;
- ecological trail “Bogino”, located at the parish house in the village of Bogina (Viciebsk region);
- ecological trail “Through creation to the creator” on the territory of St. Elisey Lawryshava Men’s Monastery (Grodna region);
- ecological trail «Road of Life» together with the ecological department of the Brest diocese in the city of Brest along the Mukhaviiec river;
- ecological trail “Kiselevichi” together with the Holy Iversky parish of Babrujsk (Magiliow region);
- ecological trail in the village of Siomkava with the participation of the temple in honor of the Ascension of the Lord in the village of Siomkava (Minsk region);
- ecological corner on the territory of the parish of the Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Rakaw (Minsk region) ;
- ecological trail on the territory of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Babrujsk (Magiliow region);

Excursion along the ecological trail “Kamennaya Gorka” at the parish of St. Nicholas of Japan, Minsk, 2016



¹⁹ [“A round table “The Church and problems of sustainable development” was held in Minsk”](#) [Electronic resource] // Electronic version of the newspaper “Tsarkounae Slova”. (Date of access: 11.02.2023).

²⁰ [“The Belarusian Orthodox Church organized an ecological forum”](#) [Electronic resource] // Official portal of the Belarusian Orthodox Church. (Date of access: 11.02.2023).

²¹ [“Communique of the round table “Environmental activities in church social service: experience and potential”](#) [Electronic resource] // Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate. (Date of access: 11.02.2023).

²² [“One of the most important manifestations of the Christian life is concern for creation.” The results of the round table «Ecological ministry of the Belarusian Orthodox Church»](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 11.02.2023); [«Ecological service that can be started tomorrow»](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

Separate round tables and meetings on environmental topics were and are being held within the framework of ecclesiastical and secular conferences: round table “The Church and the problems of sustainable development” (2009, Minsk)¹⁹; conference “Perspective of church work in the field of environmental protection” (2011, Minsk)²⁰; round table “Environmental activities in church social service: experience and potential” (chaired by Archbishop Artemiy of Grodna and Vawkavysk (Belarus) as part of the XXI International Christmas Educational Readings in Moscow, 2013, Moscow)²¹; round tables dedicated to discussing the experience of environmental ministry in the Belarusian Orthodox Church as part of the Belarusian Christmas Readings (Minsk, 2021, 2022)²².

Minsk theological schools (Orthodox seminary, academy, Institute of Theology of Belarusian State University) periodically hold scientific seminars and conferences devoted to the problem of ecology. In 2011, a scientific and practical conference was held in Minsk on the role of Christianity and education in solving environmental problems²³. In 2013, the XII Seminar of students of higher educational institutions of Belarus “Ecology: from harmony to transformation” was held on the basis of the Minsk Theological Academy and Seminary. Based on the results of the seminar, a collection of materials was published²⁴. In 2018, within the framework of the XXIV International Cyril and Methodius Readings, held at the Institute of Theology of the Belarusian State

Opening of the ecological trail
on the territory of St. Elisey
Lawryshava Men’s Monastery,
2020



²³ [“On May 26, 2011, a scientific and practical conference on the role of Christianity and education in solving environmental problems “Responsibility for Creation. Culture and Education in the Face of Environmental Challenges”](#) [Electronic resource] // Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus. (Date of access: 11.02.2023).

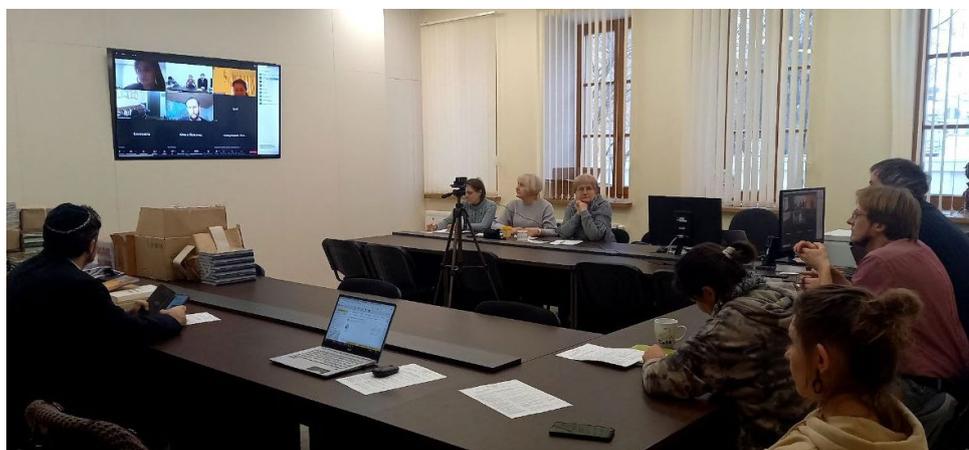
²⁴ Ecology: from harmony to transformation. XII Seminar for students of higher educational institutions of the Republic of Belarus, November 30 – December 1, 2013 – Zhirovichi: Publishing house of the Minsk Theological Seminary, 2013 – 450 p.

²⁵ [“III International Scientific and Theological Conference “God-Man-World”](#)” [Electronic resource] // Minsk Theological Academy. Announcements.

University, the section “Christianity and Actual Problems of Ecology” worked. In 2023, the Minsk Theological Academy, together with the Theological Academy of Meeting of the Lord, hosted the III International Scientific and Theological Conference “God-Man-World”, which is dedicated to the topic: “Man and the Universe: the search for harmony”²⁵.

Environmental topics gradually began to be included in the educational process in the religious educational institutions of Belarus. In particular, the Institute of Theology of the Belarusian State University annually hosts the lecture “The Church and Ecology” as part of the course “Fundamentals of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church.” Also, at one of the departments of the Institute of Theology, a special course “Church and Ecology” was agreed for Master’s students, which is scheduled for 2024.

Round table “Environmental Ministry of the Belarusian Orthodox Church”, Minsk, 2022



During the round table “The Church and the problems of sustainable development”, Minsk, 2009



Activities of the Man and Creation Program

Separately, it is worth dwelling on the example of the activities of the program “Man and Creation”²⁶ in Belarus, as today it is the main driver of the environmental agenda not only in the Belarusian Orthodox Church, but also in other confessions and religions in Belarus.

The program appeared in 2014 and was called “The Church and the Environment”. Since 2015, it has been part of the activities of the working group for the implementation of the Cooperation Program between the Belarusian Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus. Site of the program tvorenie.by is the main platform where you can learn about what is happening in the church communities of Belarus (mainly Orthodox) in the field of nature conservation. The activities of the program can be conditionally divided into several areas: informal environmental education in the church community (educational seminars, master classes and other events) and church-secular environmental projects (ecological trails, routes, exhibitions).

At the same time, the “Man and Creation” program follows certain rules in working with church communities. Firstly, the promotion of environmental values in a parish begins with specific, understandable, simple projects: installing an information stand, placing bird houses, feeders, and so on, on the territory of the parish. Secondly, education means not so much a theoretical

²⁶ [Website of the program «Man and Creation»](#). (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

Opening of the ecological exhibition “Man and Creation” in the Gomiel’ diocese, Gomiel’, 2018



Christian justification for caring for creation, but specific tips and recommendations on how to take care of nature: environmental tips for every day, tips on choosing packaging, household chemicals, rules for separate waste collection and, of course, prayers for creation.

Here are some projects and figures from the Man and Creation activity:

²⁷ [«The Day of Creation»](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

²⁸ [“A methodological manual for Sunday schools “Water Week” has appeared”](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

²⁹ [“Exhibition “Man and Creation””](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

³⁰ [Website of the program](#) (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

- seminar “Day of Prayer for Creation” – held annually for representatives of Orthodox youth and all interested²⁷;
- “Water Week” – a manual for conducting environmental classes in Sunday schools and children’s church camps²⁸;
- “Man and Creation” is a traveling exhibition for church parishes. These are informational banners that describe the various ways in which Christians can participate in the care of creation. Two versions of the exhibition have been developed: for the Orthodox and Catholic churches of Belarus²⁹;
- The Way of Silence³⁰ is a unique environmental project for Belarus, implemented jointly with the churches of the Valozhyn region. The Way of Silence is a walking route that starts from the Church of St. Euphrosyne of Polack. Iviانع, passes through settlements, forest areas and ends in Rakaw at the Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord. About 40 information stands were installed along the entire route, describing the natural, cultural and religious heritage of the territory. The site about the Way of Silence silent-way.by tells about the route in more detail;

Information stand about the route “Way of Silence” in Rakaw

Installation of a house for a barn owl in the Malamazheykava church in the village of Muravanka (Grodna region), 2021



³¹ [On the bell towers of Orthodox churches and Catholic churches in the Grodno and Brest regions, 20 artificial nests for the red book barn owl have been installed.](#) [Electronic resource] // Official portal of the Belarusian Orthodox Church. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

³² [«Search results: Artificial flowers»](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and creation. (Date of access: 01/06/2023).

³³ [«Salute of plastic»](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

³⁴ [“What to do with consecrated objects when they have become unusable?”](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

³⁵ [“The “School of youth service” on environmental topics was held in Vilnius”](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 10.02.2023).

- “House for an owl”³¹ – artificial nests for owls on temple buildings. One of the latest projects, which was aimed at preserving a rare species of barn owl, listed in the Red Book of Belarus. The project was implemented jointly with the Orthodox and Catholic churches. As a result, artificial nests for barn owls were installed on the buildings of 10 Orthodox churches in the Brest and Grodno regions (information about the project in Catholic churches will be given below);
- various journalistic investigations on church-environmental topics:
 - materials on the use of artificial flowers in the church community. Along with short articles on this topic³², a large material has been prepared that considers the problem of plastic flowers from different angles³³;
 - material on the disposal of things that were consecrated in the church³⁴;

Church-environmental topics remain a topic for international cooperation. Thus, in 2019, the Youth Department of the Vilna-Lithuanian Diocese and the program “Man and Creation” held a “School of Youth Service”³⁵ on environmental topics in Vilnius. In the same year in Riga (Latvia) a number of youth meetings were held, organized by the Department of Youth Affairs of the Synod of the Latvian Orthodox Church and the program “Man

Poster on the dangers of plastic flowers for church communities, developed by “Man and Creation” program

Summing up the results of the creative competition “The World of Nature - God’s World” in St. George’s Church in Lida, 2021



ПЛАСТИКОВЫЕ ЦВЕТЫ – проблема для человека и природы

Искусственные цветы и венки это:

- Десятки тонн пластмассы, которые разлагаются больше 100 лет
- Загрязнение земли, воздуха и воды токсичными веществами
- Опасность для нашего здоровья

Ежегодно на кладбищах в Беларуси оказывается около **1 млн** пластиковых цветов, которые затем попадают на свалку

Усопшим нужна наша молитва и добрые дела в их память, а не пластиковые цветы

Альтернатива искусственным цветам:

- Украсьте могилу живыми многолетними цветами
- На похороны старайтесь приносить живые цветы вместо искусственных венков

Не украшайте веточки вербы искусственными цветами!

³⁶ [“Orthodox youth of Latvia got acquainted with environmental projects in Belarus”](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 10.02.2023).

³⁷ [«Christianity and Environmental Problems». How was the round table at the Minsk Theological Academy](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 11.02.2023).

³⁸ [“Church-ecological life in Babrujsk: how Christians can take part in the environmental movement”](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 11.02.2023).

³⁹ [“The only green Sunday school in Belarus operates in St. George’s Church in Lida”](#) [Electronic resource] // Lidskaya gazeta. (Date of access: 15.02.2023).

⁴⁰ [“Emotional tea time with an ecologist”](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 11.02.2023).

⁴¹ [“Ecological service that can be started tomorrow”](#) [Electronic resource] // Man and Creation. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

and Creation”³⁶. Since 2016, the “Man and Creation” activity has always been presented at the assemblies of the European Christian Ecological Network, on the website of which (www.ecen.org) materials about church environmental work in Belarus are periodically posted. In 2019, a special round table “Christianity and Environmental Issues” was organized, where the main speakers were Peter Pavlovich, Secretary of the European Christian Ecological Network (ECEN), and Per Ivar Våje, responsible for the environmental activities of Christian churches in Norway³⁷.

There are also private initiatives in the Belarusian Orthodox Church, small projects are carried out by individual interested people with the support of local church communities. So, for example, in the church communities of Babrujsk, church-ecological events, excursions, quests and other initiatives are regularly held. The organizers of such events are ordinary believers with the support of their church communities³⁸. The parish Sunday school of the parish of the Church of the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious in the city of Lida received a special Green School certificate³⁹. Parishioners and Sunday school children set up bird-houses and houses for insects, plant alleys from different trees, collect batteries, hold poetry, story or drawing competitions on the topic of ecology.

In 2022, an interesting initiative called “Emotional Tea Time with an Ecologist” appeared. On the basis of the St. Elisabeth Orthodox Monastery, conversations are held on environmental topics with various guests, priests, and experts⁴⁰. Such meetings were proposed and organized by a waste expert and an Orthodox Christian with the support of the monastery. More details about these and other initiatives on the ground can be found in the material on the results of the round table on the Environmental Ministry of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, which was held in November 2022⁴¹.

Along with positive examples of environmental activities in the Belarusian Orthodox Church, there are also problematic situations from an environmental point of view. In particular, we are talking about conflict situations between church communities and local residents, local environmentalists when planning the construction of churches on the existing green area. For example, the construction of an Orthodox church on the shores of Lake Bolduk in 2015 and an Orthodox cathedral in the Partisan Glory Park in Viciebsk in 2016 provoked public outcry.

Difficult topics in the church are the use of artificial (plastic) flowers in cemeteries on Radonitsa, Palm Sunday and the topic of handling objects consecrated in the church that have become unusable. The peak of the use of plastic flowers falls on Palm Sunday and Radonitsa. According to rough estimates, annually in Belarus about one million plastic flowers (that’s about 10 tons of plastic) end up in cemeteries, which will then go to the landfill, be burned or remain

⁴² [“Why you should not buy artificial flowers for Radonitsa. Councils of orthodox ecologists”](#). [Electronic resource] // Official portal of the Belarusian Orthodox Church. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

near the cemetery. Although it is worth saying that in some parishes priests urge to abandon artificial flowers as much as possible, materials are periodically published in the church media explaining why it is worth choosing natural flowers⁴².

The topic of recycling consecrated objects in the church is also quite complicated. According to the Christian tradition, consecrated things, laminated icons, packages with religious symbols, plastic bottles from consecrated lamp oil, water are usually burned, which is not entirely environmentally friendly. However, there are other problems that also have an environmental character. The industry, including the church, abuses sacred images when it produces wine with icons, plastic bags with images of temples, various thermal stickers for Easter eggs, and so on. In addition, the issue of compromise with the reduction in the cost of church products is relevant, when a large number of cheap icons and religious paraphernalia are made of plastic. At the moment, the church does not have a clear position and recommendations on these issues and problems that would take into account environmental aspects.

Conclusion

In the Belarusian Orthodox Church today environmental activities are developing at different levels. It is important that at the level of church leadership a program of cooperation was signed with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus, a working group was created to implement this cooperation, and the creation of two environmental departments in the dioceses was supported. All these actions indicate concrete steps of the Belarusian Orthodox Church to publicly adhere to the provisions in the official documents of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the interest in promoting environmental activities in the church. There are no such examples of environmental departments in the structure of other confessions and religions in Belarus. At the same time, the attitude of the church leadership and the majority of the clergy to environmental activities is neutral. Ecological work in the church is not obligatory, no one orders the communities and does not force them to participate in environmental activities, which, on the one hand, excludes formality and artificiality in communities that independently decide to work in this direction. On the other hand, the level of environmental activity and engagement of official structures in the church today is quite low. In relation to the total number of Orthodox communities (more than 1700), a very small part of them participate in the environmental movement – approximately 1-2%. If we take the communities that one-time took part in various environmental initiatives (exhibitions, environmental seminars, garbage collection, bike rides, etc.), then the share of such parishes will be approximately 10-15%.

At the parish level, most communities of the Belarusian Orthodox Church are open to environmental initiatives. In recent years, environmental issues in Orthodox communities have been perceived as an additional tool for working with children and youth, as well as a means to increase the social visibility of the parish. This is well illustrated by the experience of communities that have organized ecological trails or ecological corners. Such objects are well perceived at the level of the parish and at the level of the city, in public places, parks, green areas.

For many parishes and priests, environmental issues are associated not only with educational projects, but also with the use of alternative energy sources in parishes. They are interested in the experience of using solar panels, wind farms. However, practically no one is ready today to spend money on acquiring such things, even if they save energy, heat, and so on.

If we talk about non-formal environmental education in the church community, then on the part of many leaders of Sunday schools, youth fraternities, there is a request for recommendations on environmental education and upbringing in parishes, in manuals for Sunday schools, manuals, applied materials. Despite modern technologies and trends (online courses, lectures, multimedia stories), such simple tools and demonstration materials as the traveling exhibition “Man and Creation”, which we talked about earlier, remain in demand for Sunday and general education teachers.

At the level of private initiatives, active parishioners and priests appear who find opportunities to implement environmental initiatives.

Recommendations

First of all, it is important to note that the recommendations for the Belarusian Orthodox Church, which will be given below, can be used in relation to other confessions and religions. Some of them are universal in some sense. It is also worth noting that not only recommendations are given regarding small projects, but also those that can be called ambitious in modern conditions (projects in the long term).

1. For the further development of environmental ministry, efforts are needed to popularize the environmental direction in the church environment, in particular, among the clergy, as well as support from the hierarchy.

To implement this recommendation, it is important to have responsible for environmental activities in each diocese of the Belarusian Orthodox Church. According to the Guidelines on the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in environmental

⁴³ [Methodological recommendations on the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in environmental protection.](#) [Electronic resource] // Official website of the Moscow Patriarchate. (Date of access: 06.01.2023).

activities in the dioceses, “coordination of environmental activities at the diocesan level can be carried out by the chairman of the diocesan Department for Church and Society Relations or another person appointed by the ruling bishop”⁴³.

It can also be recommended to periodically cover the topic of environmental service within the framework of the annual diocesan meetings of the clergy, as well as to consider the possibility of creating specialized special courses on the topic of environmental service within the framework of theological educational institutions of the Belarusian Orthodox Church.

2. It is important to integrate the topic of environmental ministry into various educational and catechetical processes within the church.

To do this, we can recommend developing a handbook for Sunday schools on caring for nature and methodological recommendations for children’s church summer camps on organizing environmental events.

It would be useful to develop recommendations for youth fraternities/parish groups on integrating environmental issues into youth activities.

It also seems relevant to develop an environmental education program for parishioners, which will include basic elements on environmental behavior and theological understanding of environmental issues.

3. It is important to develop an internal church discussion on various environmental issues and to formulate the Church’s attitude to the most pressing environmental challenges.

It seems important to organize regular round tables and conferences for the participation of both theologians and various ecologists.

We recommend increasing the visibility of church environmental issues and publishing more thematic materials for the internal church media, including materials on church environmental events held, as well as materials on discussion topics.

Representatives of the Belarusian Orthodox Church should take part in international conferences on environmental issues, exchange experiences by organizing online meetings and events, to develop international contacts and cooperation. The experience

⁴⁴ [“How to build temples without harm to nature”](#) [Electronic resource] // Online magazine Ecoidea. (Date of access 02/15/2023).

of the Belarusian Orthodox Church in environmental activities is of interest not only to Orthodox churches abroad, but also to other Christian denominations.

Given the cases of conflict situations in the construction of temples, it seems appropriate to develop and implement a policy for the construction of temples in green areas. A positive example of the construction of religious buildings without harm to nature is the experience of the Guild of Temple Builders in Russia. This experience is described in sufficient detail in the material “How to build temples without harm to nature”⁴⁴ and can serve as a subject for discussion during the meeting of the clergy.

It is important to initiate a discussion on the disposal of consecrated objects with the involvement of caring laity, interested clergy, and environmentalists. This would be useful for developing certain recommendations and then discussing them.

4. It is necessary to develop and support parish environmental initiatives

In particular, church parishes and monasteries can organize educational ecological trails and routes, using the experience of communities that already have such facilities. Parishes can use existing trail layouts and information boards, or develop their own eco-trail concept.

It is also possible to create small educational ecological spaces in the territory of the parish. It is similar to creating an ecological trail, but with much fewer information boards and at a lower cost.

The basic recommendation is to establish separate collection of waste at the parish with the organization of information support.

For a number of parishes, the introduction of renewable energy sources (in particular, solar panels for generating electricity or heating water), which can also be used for educational purposes, may be a relevant direction.

Environmental Agenda in the Roman Catholic Church

⁴⁵ [Religious communities in the Republic of Belarus \(as of January 1, 2023\)](#) [Electronic resource] // Commissioner for Religious Affairs and Nationalities. (Date of access: 15.01.2023).

⁴⁶ John Paul II. Thoughts about the earth. – M.: News, 1992. – 424 p.

⁴⁷ Pope Francis. [Encyclical Laudato Si' on caring for a common home.](#) – M.: NO Publishing house of the Franciscans, 2015. – 192 p.; [Encyclical Laudato Si' by Father Francis on caring for a common home.](#) [Electronic resource] // (Date of access: 15.03.2023).

⁴⁸ [Compendium of the social teaching of the Church](#) [Electronic resource] // (Date of access: 15.03.2023).

The Roman Catholic Church is the second largest confession in Belarus: 500 communities⁴⁵, about 1.5 million Catholics.

Both in the world and in Belarus, environmental issues in the Catholic Church became relevant in the public space thanks to the works of Pope John Paul II⁴⁶, and later, thanks to the publication of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), which is devoted to environmental problems and environmental protection. The encyclical has been translated into Russian and is available in Belarus in printed and electronic form⁴⁷. The encyclical is an excellent introduction to Christian attitudes towards environmental issues. The six chapters deal in succession with various issues related to the environmental crisis. The first chapter, “What’s Happening to Our House”, is devoted to a brief overview of the environmental problems of our time and reflection on the concept of “environmental debt.” The second chapter, “The Gospel of Creation”, addresses the analysis of the biblical concept of man’s responsibility for creation. The third chapter, “The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis”, is devoted to reflection from a Christian position on modern technology, labor, and the limits of scientific progress. The fourth chapter, “Integral Ecology”, proposes a new model of justice and insists on the relationship of environmental issues with social and human issues. This chapter is the “heart, the main essence” of what Pope Francis proposes in his encyclical. The fifth chapter “Some lines of orientation and action” calls for discussion and dialogue in the issue of environmental problems, insists on fair and transparent decision-making processes. The sixth chapter “Ecological education and spirituality” indicates the need to change habits and behavior through environmental education.

In addition to the encyclical, the *Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church* (2004) can be considered an important document that sheds light on the relationship of the church to the natural environment⁴⁸. The tenth chapter of the compendium is devoted to the protection of the environment and examines the biblical aspects, the place and role of man in the emergence and solution of environmental problems. Attention is focused on

⁴⁹ [At Rosica, the Stork event has been organized.](#) (Date of access: 12.12.2022).

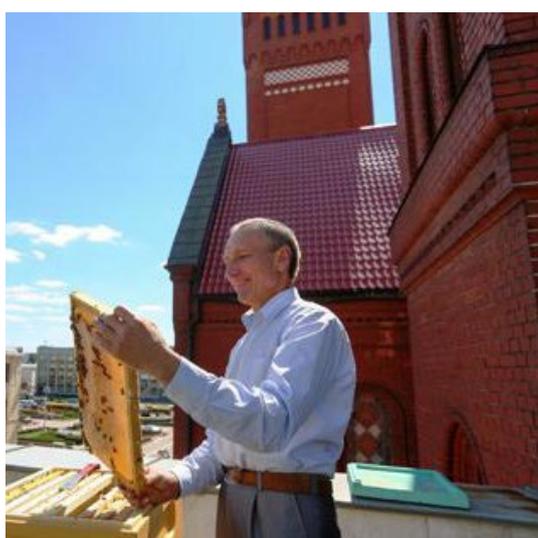
⁵⁰ [Support for environmental management in church organizations.](#) (Date of access: 12.12.2022).

the fact that the environment is a collective good and therefore people have a common responsibility to preserve nature.

The Church of Belarus speaks out publicly on environmental issues and in defense of the natural environment, taking part in various state and interconfessional thematic events.

If you turn to the websites of the Roman Catholic Church of Belarus <https://catholic.by/>, <https://catholicnews.by/>, you can see regular updates of information about environmental initiatives in the world and in Belarus. Basically, in Belarus, environmental events are initiated by individual priests or representatives of environmental secular organizations. For example, the initiative of the community from the village of Rositca (Viciebsk region) is noteworthy, where priest Cheslav Kurechko held a festival dedicated to storks⁴⁹, and also grew tulips himself and gave them to local residents, spoke about love for nature, caring for it. One of the churches in the village of Luchai (Viciebsk region) participated in the White Stork environmental certification program and subsequently actively participated in various environmental events⁵⁰, and bees were placed on the roof of the Red Church in Minsk (the Church of St. Simeon and Helena) . The initiative of such an unusual project belonged to the rector of the church. Also, in the Red Church a few years ago, the opening of the environmental exhibition “Man and Creation” was held – an initia-

Bee apiary on the roof of St. Simeon and Helena, Minsk



Environmental events in the parish of St. Michael the Archangel in Smargon



⁵¹ [PHOTO REPORT: Apiary appeared on the roof of the Red Church in Minsk](#) (Date of access 12.12.2022).

⁵² [Exhibition «Man and Creation»](#) (Date of access: 12.12.2022).

⁵³ [“Wreath of birds” by the priest Syargey Surynovich. In Viciebsk, there will be an exhibition of the creative artist who is a priest.](#) [Electronic resource] // Catholicnews.by portal. (Date of access: 14.12.2022).

⁵⁴ [“On the territory of the catholic church of St. Ignatsy in Viciebsk bird feeders were installed.](#) [Electronic resource] // Catholicnews.by portal. (Date of access: 12.12.2022).

tive of the “Man and Creation” program and the church. The exhibition periodically worked in several churches in Belarus⁵²: in Minsk and the Minsk region, in Pinsk, Smargon.

A good example of the inclusion of an environmental component in the work with children in the church is the experience of the parish of St. Michael the Archangel in Smargon. For example, on Family Day, which traditionally takes place in parishes, various quests are arranged for children, among which there are necessarily environmental tasks. In addition, when a summer camp takes place (it is also called a “summer oratory” in the parish), there is always an ecology day. Ecological games are held on this day, excursions to the nearest reservoir and city park, where children, together with the organizers of the camp, study the species composition of birds.

Ecological events in the church include such events as the creative exhibition “Wreath of birds” by a priest and an artist from Druja, which takes place in Viciebsk (the exhibition calls for a careful and responsible attitude to the world created by God⁵³), as well as the fact that the Jesuit fathers from Viciebsk placed bird feeders on the territory of the parish in winter⁵⁴.

The work of the ecological exhibition “Man and Creation” in one of the churches in Minsk, 2018



The work of the ecological exhibition “Man and Creation” in the parish of St. Michael the Archangel in Smargon, 2019



⁵⁵ [“House for the Owl” starts monitoring](#) (Date of access: 12.12.2022).

⁵⁶ This problem is also relevant for Orthodox churches. For Protestant churches, this problem is less relevant, since their churches are most often newly built and heating issues were resolved at the construction stage.

One of the latest environmental projects in churches is the installation of artificial nests for barn owls on temple buildings in 2020-2021. As a result, artificial owl nests were installed on 11 churches in Belarus (in the Brest and Grodno regions)⁵⁵.

Although the initiative of such a project came from a secular environmental project, the diocese (diocesan) leadership and priests supported this idea and took it positively, even with some inspiration that the church could thus serve to preserve nature.

It should be noted that the churches took an active part in surveys related to the problems of heating and maintaining heat in the church buildings in the winter. In Belarus, heating the premises of churches is difficult due to economically unjustified costs, so prayers are often performed in a cold church⁵⁶. In addition, the architecture and age of temples do not allow the use of modern technologies (for example, the use of solar collectors to heat a building), since temples are often classified as architectural monuments. Today, many churches use air heat guns for heating. It is significant that when it comes to the church and ecology, the priests point to this very problem, emphasizing that it is necessary to look for its ecological solution. An interesting example of a partial heating solution is the Church of the Heart

A sign about a barn owl near the Trinity Church in the village of Sheresheva (Brest region), where a nesting place was established, 2021

Infrared film for heating on the seats in the Church of the Heart of Jesus in the village of Slabodka



⁵⁷ [“Heating benches in a Catholic church in the village of Slabodka”](#). [Electronic resource] // (Date of access: 12.12.2022).

of Jesus in the village of Slabodka (Braslaw district, Viciebsk region). The company that carried out the work described in sufficient detail the options for heating church premises and shared their experience in insulating benches with the help of special heating elements⁵⁷.

On the other hand, if it is necessary to point out the “environmental friendliness” of the church community, priests often refer to the green area around the temples. In fact, in most churches, the temple areas are surrounded with flower beds, trees, shrubs (for example, the Trinity Church in the village of Gierviaty (Grodna region)), compositions made from natural materials: waterfalls, ponds, slides, etc. All this is monitored by parishioners, sometimes the gardener or even the priest himself, which to some extent is the participation of the church in environmental activities. And the fact of preserving and maintaining the green area around the temple in itself is following the commandment to preserve nature and take care of it. However, such activities are not always understood on the value level as ecological (for example, for parishioners who take care of the territory, this is rather obedience or work). For this reason, this is not advertised in the public space: in articles, information on the websites of the church, in church media.

Natural composition
of the temple area of the Trinity
Church in Gierviaty (Grodna
region)



⁵⁸ [“In Kotovka park of Minsk, where a catholic church will be built, people are protesting against cutting down trees”](#): [Electronic resource] // Katolik life. (Date of access: 12.12.2022).

As a result of personal visits to several churches in the Grodna region, environmental initiatives are found, about which there is no information on official websites or in other sources. Near the churches in Indura and Shilavichy people regularly take care of the nests of storks that settle on the territory of the temple. Sometimes you have to build nests for storks – in Shilavichy, a water tower was destroyed, where birds lived for a long time, and a nest was made for them on the territory of the church. In Viarejki, for twenty years of service, a priest arranged a real botanical garden around the church with rare species of trees. In Gniezna, a priest is engaged in beekeeping and takes care of the bee apiary. Such examples are enough to talk about it and set an example.

As in the Belarusian Orthodox Church in the Roman Catholic Church in 2016, there was a conflict regarding the construction of a church on a green area, on the site of Kotovka Park in Minsk (2016)⁵⁸; As a result, the construction of the temple was suspended and the city authorities allocated another site.

Recommendations

It is important to promote the topic of environmental service in the audience of the Catholic Church in Belarus

To do this, the editorial offices of the Catholic media in Belarus need to prepare and post on websites more thematic journalistic materials about existing environmental initiatives, even if these are the initiatives of one priest or individual believers.

It makes sense for those responsible for the Catholic media in Belarus to consider the possibility of creating a separate resource in the form of a web page dedicated to the encyclical, environmental ideas and projects in the Catholic Church in Belarus. Such a page can become another platform for communication and exchange of experience between communities that are involved in nature conservation.

Dioceses and individual parishes can prepare materials on environmental topics: about the dangers of artificial flowers, with environmental advice, excerpts from *Laudato Si'* encyclicals and distribute them in the communities.

It is possible to use the “Man and Creation” exhibition during events with children and youth, during summer church camps, during recollections⁵⁹.

Catholic Scouts may consider organizing the *Laudato Si'* walking trail to promote the encyclical. They can prepare a concept and arrange a meeting with the spiritual leadership and represen-

⁵⁹ Recollection in the Catholic tradition is a time of reflection or spiritual work, a deepening in the understanding of some topics: family, faith, vocation, etc. Often recollections take place in monasteries or special houses for recollections.

tatives of the church to agree on, supplement, the concept of the route. The route can be organized as a path for pilgrims.

It seems important to prepare and hold a conference or a round table to study the experience of environmental work in the church and church communities in the world and in Belarus. As part of these events, it is worth discussing and preparing recommendations for the construction of temples in green areas.

It is important to support parish environmental projects

Parishes are encouraged to use their temple grounds and organize eco-paths and eco-spaces that promote the Laudato Si' encyclical, eco-friendly habits, or tell more about church eco-projects: bee apiary, arboretum, etc.

It is worth continuing the project to place artificial nests for the barn owl on the buildings of churches in the Brest and Grodna regions, where its habitats have been discovered.

Environmental Agenda in Evangelical Christian Baptist Communities



⁶⁰ [Religious communities in the Republic of Belarus \(as of January 1, 2023\)](#) [Electronic resource] // Commissioner for Religious Affairs and Nationalities. (Date of access: 15.01.2023).

⁶¹ [The social concept of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists](#). [Electronic resource] Centralized religious organization Russian United Union of Christian Baptists. (Date of access: 02.12.2022).

⁶² [The social position of the Protestant churches in Russia. "Participation of believers in nature protection"](#): [Electronic resource] Centralized religious organization Russian United Union of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals). (Date of access: 02.12.2022).

There are 282 communities of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Belarus⁶⁰, approximately 14 thousand members of the church. Most of them are in Minsk and Brest regions. The main activities of the community began in the late 80s of the 20th century: Sunday schools for children were opened, missionary work and spiritual education appeared in new places. Since 1997, the Minsk Theological Seminary has been in operation.

In the official documents of the Evangelical Christian Baptists of Belarus, the position on environmental issues is not spelled out. However, the Evangelical Christian Baptist of Belarus and Russia are in close contact and the commonality of doctrinal principles allows us to refer to some official documents of the Russian Evangelical Christian Baptists and Protestant churches. Thus, in the Social Concept of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists (adopted on May 30, 2014)⁶¹, in chapter 17 "Attitude towards ecology and the ecological situation", in several paragraphs, the negative impact of man on nature is stated in several paragraphs, despite the injunction to man in the Holy Scripture to take care of God's creation. Evangelical Christian Baptists consider the development of ecological theology and readiness to take part in ecological events together with state and non-state organizations, to propagate the ideas of respect for nature to be one of the private social tasks of Evangelical Christian Baptists.

A more detailed attitude to environmental issues is also proposed in the Social Position of the Protestant Churches in Russia (2003)⁶². In addition to general remarks about the relationship between the ecological and spiritual crisis, brief theological reflections on the end of the world, the significance of redemption in connection with the ecological situation, the position contains a separate paragraph "Participation of believers in nature conservation". It allows believers to participate "in lawsuits and other actions against violations of environmental laws, using exclusively non-violent methods of upholding environmental rights", with the proviso that this should not be a political action. To change the environmental habits of people, according to the position, it is necessary "to conduct special classes with children,

⁶³ [The social position of the Protestant churches in Russia. "Participation of believers in nature protection": \[Electronic resource\] Centralized religious organization Russian United Union of Evangelical Christians \(Pentecostals\). \(Date of access: 02.12.2022\).](#)

adolescents, youth (especially in summer camps and trips), worship in the bosom of nature, missionary and pastoral sermons, and spiritual literature are needed. The most important role in environmental education is played by the family⁶³.

Employees of the Minsk Theological Seminary of Evangelical Christian Baptists are working on the formation of their social position, which will be documented later. Environmental topics, they said, will be included in the document without fail.

If we talk about the environmental work of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Belarus, then community representatives most often refer to the existence of so-called Christian labor camps: they are young people who help organize children's summer camps in nature, as well as clean up the territory or build church communities. Unfortunately, there are no specific environmental projects in the communities of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Belarus today. Representatives of the Minsk Theological Seminary, speaking about the opportunities for organizing environmental initiatives, allow the meeting of the "Man and Creation" program with students of the seminary, the inclusion of the issue of environmental education in Sunday schools, as well as the creation of an ecological trail on the territory of one of the church communities in Belarus.

In general, representatives of Baptist communities have an open attitude to environmental issues, but there is some caution in front of environmental initiatives due to the novelty of the subject, lack of experience in implementing environmental projects and initiatives.

On the official website of the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists in the Republic of Belarus <https://baptist.by/rukovodstvo-sojuza/>, the search engine does not find anything for the query "ecology". In the media, environmental issues are not disclosed or presented in any way.

Examples of environmental issues faced by Evangelical Christian Baptist include the generation and disposal of single-use plastic waste from children's camps in nature.

Recommendations

- It is necessary to develop guidelines for conducting environmental talks and activities for leaders of home groups for the study of the Holy Scriptures and family service. Such home groups can be the “entry point” of the environmental theme into the communities of the Evangelical Christian Baptist of Belarus. Home groups are held several times a week for young people and all comers. The leader of the group determines the subject and plan of the lesson. These are small groups of 10-20 people. Family groups gather less often - several times a month, but more numerous – 50-60 people.
 - Leaders of ministries, pastors should initiate meetings on environmental topics in their communities.
 - The Minsk Theological Seminary should include meetings with ecologists in the program of extracurricular activities. At the pastoral department, this will be most expedient, since both current and future employees of the church are trained there.
 - Organizers of children’s church summer camps should invite ecologists and conduct classes with children on caring for nature.
 - The leadership of the Evangelical Christian Baptist in Belarus should consider the possibility of holding a conference, a round table for leaders of home groups, leaders of ministries, pastors on environmental topics.
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Environmental Agenda in Evangelical Christian (EC) Communities

⁶⁴ [Religious communities in the Republic of Belarus \(as of January 1, 2023\)](#) [Electronic resource] // Commissioner for Religious Affairs and Nationalities. (Date of access: 15.01.2023).

⁶⁵ [History of the Pentecostal Movement](#) [Electronic resource] // Theological Institute of the KhVE. (Date of access: 15.01.2023).

⁶⁶ [Doctrine of the Evangelical Christian RB](#): [Electronic resource] // United Church of Evangelical Christians. (Date of access: 13.12.2022).

⁶⁷ [Fundamentals of the social concept. Centralized religious organization Russian United Union of Evangelical Christians \(Pentecostals\)](#). [Electronic resource] (Date of access: 13.12.2022).

The United Church of Evangelical Christians is the largest evangelical association in Belarus. As of January 1, 2023, the brotherhood of Christians of the Evangelical Faith unites 525 local registered churches⁶⁴, more than 30 thousand people are baptized members of the church, 55 thousand attend worship⁶⁵. The Theological Institute and the Bible College of Evangelical Christians operate in Belarus.

There is no official position or document on the attitude towards environmental issues, but some aspects of the relationship between man and the world, nature are revealed in the document “The Doctrine of the EC” in the Republic of Belarus⁶⁶. The commonality of doctrine and cooperation between the Belarusian and Russian Pentecostal Churches also makes it possible to refer to the document “Fundamentals of the Social Concept” of the Russian United Union of Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals), which contains a separate chapter “The Church of Evangelical Christians and Problems of Ecology”⁶⁷.

There are no separate classes, lectures or courses on ecology in the educational institutions of the Evangelical Christian in Belarus. Periodically, this topic is included in classes at the Faculty of Education at the Theological Institute. The faculty prepares Sunday school teachers who should know how to teach children about caring for nature.

Summer camps for children organized by the Evangelical Christian are another place where they talk to children and youth about ecology. This is done by both Sunday school teachers and pastors and deacons.

As part of social service, the communities of the Evangelical Christian very often have to work in rural areas, in small towns, where community members are engaged in landscaping, planting greenery in the territory of the church, which can also be an element of environmental service.

As in most Christian communities, one of the problems in the Evangelical Christian communities is the generation of a large amount of waste during children's, youth activities, for example, during children's camps in nature. In such cases, single-use tableware is used, which, however, is then taken out by special transport to garbage containers. If children's and youth camps are held in stationary recreation centers, then reusable tableware is used.

One of the features of the Evangelical Christian communities in Belarus, which can be attributed to the environmental sphere, is the almost complete absence of green areas around prayer houses and churches. Basically, all houses are located close to other city buildings, located "inside" the city. Therefore, the organization of gardens, flower beds around or near churches is difficult. Of course, there are some exceptions, such as the Grace Church in Minsk. During the construction of the church, a plot was allocated where an orchard (apple tree) grew, which the community tried to preserve. In addition, additional trees were planted where landscaping required it.

Landscaping of the territory
of the Church "Grace"
of the EC in Minsk



Recommendations

The leadership of the Evangelical Christian is open to new opportunities for work in the field of environmental education and education of believers. As a result of communication with the leadership of the Evangelical Christian in Belarus, the following recommendations were made.

- The leadership of the Theological Institute (Minsk) should plan and conduct introductory educational thematic meetings with students of the pedagogical and theological faculties.
 - Organizers of children's church summer camps should hold a number of environmental events with children.
 - Communities of the Pentecostal Church (first in Minsk) should hold a series of educational environmental meetings for young families and young mothers as part of special church programs for young mothers, which are regularly held in the communities.
 - The leadership of the Theological Institute should adapt and prepare several environmental banners from the church-ecological exhibition "Man and Creation" for placement in the communities.
 - The leadership of the Evangelical Christian will select several communities on the territory of which one or more information stands dedicated to the Christian attitude to nature can be placed. Despite the almost complete absence of green areas near churches, such stands in the amount of 1-3 units will be an organic continuation of the urban atmosphere around the church, but with an awareness of the place and role of man in the created world.
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Environmental Agenda in the Evangelical Lutheran Church

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is one of the fewest churches in Belarus. For 2022, three communities are registered in Belarus – in Grodna, Viciebsk and Minsk. These communities represent the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belarus at the official level and in the public space. About 20 communities of the so-called Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church are registered in Belarus. However, representatives of these communities do not participate in official interconfessional events and are inactive in the media and Internet resources. In this review, this direction of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is not considered. According to unofficial data, about 500 people belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belarus.

Network power plant
on the building belonging to
the Lutheran Church in Grodna



⁶⁸ [Church and ecology](#) [Electronic resource] // Lutheran church in Grodna. (Date of access: 01.11.2022).

On <http://luther.by/> – the site of one of the three Lutheran communities at the only functioning Lutheran church in Belarus (Grodna) – there is a special tab “Church and Ecology”⁶⁸. Since 2013, the Lutheran community in Grodna has been participating in a project to introduce an environmental management system in church communities in Belarus. The parish in Grodna passed environmental certification and received the White Stork environmental certificate. The principles of environmental management are still defining in the environmental activities of the community and its parishioners. At the public level, they talk about the implementation of the environmental policy of the community, take part in environmental events (planting trees), periodically hold environmental meetings for parishioners of the community in Grodna. Near the temple there is a bicycle parking, solar panels are installed on the temple building, which generate electricity.

The Evangelical Lutheran community in Grodna, headed by its pastor, actively participates in environmental events, seminars, meetings that take place in Minsk and throughout Belarus. Thus, first of all, thanks to the openness to the topic of ecology of the pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran community in Grodna, it is possible to assess the further environmental potential of Lutheran communities as promising: joint environmental events, projects, joint organization of ecological trails and routes are always possible. Due to the small number of communities, environmental issues are not presented in Sunday school or are rarely touched upon during educational conversations with adults. At the same time, one can notice a certain trend in the community in the field of ecology: not only carrying out one-time environmental events, but also long-term, practical projects in the community aimed at saving resources, water, heat, electricity, etc.

Recommendations

- The Evangelical Lutheran community in Grodna needs to use the territory of the church to promote the environmental policy of the community, the Christian view of environmental problems. The Lutheran church in Grodna is one of the attractions not only of the city, but also of Belarus. Part of a small green area near the temple is always open to visitors and can serve as a place where people learn not only about the environmental work of the community, but also about environmental habits and advice.
- The leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran communities in Belarus should further develop the ideas and practices of using renewable energy sources.

- The pastor of the community in Grodna should initiate the re-ecological certification and obtain a new certificate. To do this, you can contact the consulting and methodological center of the White Stork network of the RSEOO Living Partnership.
 - The leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran communities in Belarus should initiate small church-secular environmental projects together with local authorities: planting trees, organizing ecological trails.
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Environmental Agenda in Muslim communities



⁶⁹ [Religious communities in the Republic of Belarus \(as of January 1, 2023\)](#) [Electronic resource] // Commissioner for Religious Affairs and Nationalities. (Date of access: 01/15/2023).; See also: Kanapatskaya Z.I. Islam and the Tatar diaspora in the Republic of Belarus // History of the formation of the material and spiritual culture of the Tatars of Kazakhstan and Siberia: materials of the International Scientific and Practical Conference, Ust-Kamenogorsk, September 29 – October 1, 2006 – Ust-Kamenogorsk, 2006. – P. 230-235.

⁷⁰ [Search results for «ecology» on the site https://islam.plus](#) (Date of access: 20.11.2022).

⁷¹ [Declaration drafting team.](#) [Electronic resource] // The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences. (Date of access 20.11.2022).

In total, 24 Muslim communities are registered in Belarus. According to various sources, from 20 to 100 thousand people profess Islam⁶⁹. The Islamic communities of Belarus do not adhere to any official documents describing their attitude to environmental problems. All principles of attitude towards nature are found in the Quran, Sunnah, collections of hadiths (for example, “Gardens of the Righteous” by Imam Nawawi). It is worth noting that on an international scale, Islam, as one of the most widespread religions, is very active in the environmental sphere. In Russian, you can find quite a lot of information on the site <https://islam.plus>⁷⁰. There is an “Islamic climate declaration” (2015)⁷¹ and a description of other initiatives, green guidelines for Islam in English. For example, ecological sermons in Islam (green khutbas) are popular, which are held around the world in Muslim communities during Earth Day. In Belarus, green khutbas are also periodically performed, although rarely. On the websites of the Muslim Religious Association in the Republic of Belarus (<https://www.mechet.by/> and islambel.by) and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in the Republic of Belarus (https://www.dumbel.by) there is no information for the query “ecology”.

According to representatives of Islam (RRO “Muslim Religious Association in the Republic of Belarus”), in Belarus there is a relationship between the presence of environmental issues in religious communities and in society. This topic is not acute in the Belarusian society and therefore this topic is not always interesting for religious communities and believers. Given the wary attitude towards Islam on the public agenda, as well as some more pressing issues within the Muslim community, environmental issues, among other issues discussed among the Muslims of Belarus, are not in the first place.

However, in Muslim communities during classes on Islam with adults and children, in Sunday schools, the theme of caring for nature is somehow present. Occasionally, separate classes are held dedicated to ecology (training in caring for nature, water, animals). Also, environmental ethics as part of Islamic ethics (akhlaq) and teachings are regularly explained during classes

and sermons and supported by quotations from sacred sources (Quran, Sunnah).

In Islam, the universe is seen as a single community. These are not only people, a community of believers, but the whole world in general, all creations are communities that praise Allah the Almighty. From this point of view, if a person harms nature, this is perceived as an attack on communities that exalt Allah the Almighty, and the situation of this person is very deplorable.

There is a general rule about mercy to the world around us, commanded by the Prophet Muhammad: "Have mercy on those who are around you on earth, and those who are in heaven will have mercy" (meaning the angels sending mercy from God to earth). Mercy is prescribed to show not only to people. One must show mercy even in the matter of slaughtering an animal. If a person needs meat, wool, then, from the point of view of Islamic ethics, one should not torture the animal, one should also try to do everything as quickly as possible, without causing unnecessary suffering. It is impossible to kill animals aimlessly, it is impossible to use animals as living targets for shooting. There are hadiths that tell how animals complained to the prophet about people who tortured them.

At the level of practical life in Belarusian Muslim communities, environmental issues and problems have always arisen. During children's summer camps, a large amount of single-use tableware is formed. Sometimes, to solve this problem, a rule is introduced to take your own dishes and wash them yourself. But in the month of Ramadan, a huge number of people gather near the mosque in Minsk to eat, which makes it impossible to resolve the issue with an alternative to single-use tableware, because up to a thousand people come. And although some parishioners take thermoses and their own dishes with them, this does not solve the problem and is rather an exception.

Among the practical actions, some Muslim communities took part in planting forests in Belarus. One of the shifts in the children's camp was devoted to ecology. In addition, the general teaching on the need for cleanliness encourages regular cleanings to be held both on the territory of mosques and in cemeteries. Another factor that contributes to the preservation of the cleanliness of the environment is the condemnation by Islam of the use of plastic flowers, lamps, etc. on the graves, as manifestations of excess and assimilation to ignorant people.

Recommendations

In general, representatives of the spiritual leadership of Muslim communities are open to interaction in this area and are ready for cooperation.

- The leadership of the Muslim communities in Belarus needs to develop environmental activities at the interconfessional level and take part in common environmental projects in Belarus.
 - The leadership of the Minsk mosque to plan and implement an ecological space, a path near the mosque in Minsk in the park. The territory of the park is a former Muslim cemetery and, according to the community, such an object will help to tell about the history of Islam in Belarus, the history of the area and will contribute to the careful attitude to the park.
 - Organizers of children's summer camps should include environmental topics in classes with children.
 - The editors of the official websites of the Muslims of Belarus (mechet.by, dumbel.by) should promote among the Belarusian communities the ecological ideas of Islam, which are popular abroad. To do this, prepare a number of thematic articles, translations, materials, interviews about Islam and ecology.
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Environmental Agenda in Jewish communities

⁷² [Religious communities in the Republic of Belarus \(as of January 1, 2023\) \[Electronic resource\] // Commissioner for Religious Affairs and Nationalities. \(Date of access: 15.01.2023\).](#)

Religious associations of Orthodox Judaism operate in Belarus – the Jewish Religious Association (JRA), Chabad (or Lubavitch Hasidism) and the religious association of communities of progressive Judaism (ROOPI in the Republic of Belarus). According to various sources, there are about 20-40 thousand Jews in Belarus, but most of them are not active believers. Since 1993, the religious association of communities of progressive Judaism in the Republic of Belarus has been actively developing: there are 15 communities in Belarus, Sunday schools, several Jewish kindergartens and secondary schools are operating⁷².

As such, there are no official documents that address the issue of Judaism's attitude to ecology. Judaism is guided by the principle of "do no harm", according to which a person has no right to harm nature. If a person cannot restore something in nature as a result of their activity, then this is considered to be harm to it. Particular attention in Judaism is paid to the holiday of Tu Bishvat - literally it means "New Year of the Trees". In Israel, it is an environmental awareness day. Trees are planted in its honor. Since this day falls on February, there is no opportunity to plant trees in Belarus (unlike Israel), so the history of the holiday is remembered in Belarusian communities (the tradition of giving tithes to priests from the fruits of the harvest). In the communities of progressive Judaism in Belarus on this day, informal conversations are held about ecology, about the value of not only animals, but also plants, about the value of water. Water is another of the most important topics that are present in the conversations in the Sunday schools of the Jewish communities in Belarus. The topic of water and the conservation of water resources, non-pollution of water is so important because there are many deserts in Israel and water for the Jews is of sacred value. In the Belarusian communities of progressive Judaism, such environmental discussions are conducted by specialists from among the members of the community in a natural manner. In other words, environmental issues are present in the life of communities, but are not framed in the form of special classes in Sunday schools, special topics during children's summer camps, at school.

Recommendations

Representatives of the association of communities of progressive Judaism in Belarus are open to cooperation in the field of nature conservation at the community level. They need to develop environmental work in several directions:

- Environmental education is one of the areas that are in demand in Jewish communities. One of the target groups is young families. They form the backbone of communities and are interested in environmental issues, environmental advice and recommendations. The first meetings can be started in the Minsk communities.
 - Working with children in the framework of children's summer camps: organizing environmental quests, games, classes, excursions, master classes.
 - Preparation of the concept and organization of an ecological trail or ecological space for non-formal education together with the Jewish school "Atikva" in the city of Gomial.
 - Organization of spring and autumn tree planting campaigns together with the Jewish communities.
 - Preparation of materials for the media on environmental initiatives, the relationship between the Jewish confession and ecology.
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Summary of the Review and General Recommendations

The development of environmental activities with the participation of religious communities in Belarus is proceeding slowly, but quite confidently. Over the past 10 years, environmental issues have become more prominent in the religious environment of Belarus. The variety of environmental initiatives presented in the review is proof of this.

The communities of the Belarusian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches are the most active in environmental activities. This activity is manifested at different levels, including the parish and personal ones among the parishioners. Separate initiatives go to the diocesan or church level. The existing experience of working with these churches allows us to give detailed conclusions and recommendations, which was done in the relevant sections of the review. Most of the Protestant, Jewish and Muslim communities in Belarus are at the beginning of their participation in the environmental movement.

Taking into account the results of the survey for each of the studied confessions, it is necessary to point out the need to strengthen and further develop a systematic approach in the environmental activities of the religious communities in Belarus. There are several large areas that will serve as the basis for the development of such a systematic approach:

Increasing the internal capacity of religious organizations to work with environmental challenges and topics.

It seems important to develop a theological understanding of environmental problems through the organization of thematic conferences and round tables, the introduction of small special courses, electives, considering religious and environmental topics in the educational religious organizations of Belarus. Such events should include a discussion of the attitude of religious organizations to current environmental challenges, such as climate change, environmental pollution, the introduction of sustainable development models, etc.

⁷³ [European Christian Environmental Network](#)
(Date of access: 04.03.2023).

International cooperation in the field of ecology will also contribute to the involvement of religious communities in environmental issues. Meetings and conferences are regularly held abroad, there is an interest in the experience of environmental work in the post-Soviet countries. For example, once every two years, the European Christian Ecological Network (ECEN⁷³) assembly, which we have already mentioned above, takes place regularly. At the assemblies, churches from different parts of Europe share their experience of environmental work. Representatives of other, non-Christian religions may take part in the assemblies.

Work within religious organizations to reduce their own ecological footprint and implement positive environmental practices.

It is recommended to introduce environmentally friendly and innovative technologies and methods of handling materials into parish activities, focused on saving natural resources and safe for the environment. These can be certain practices by communities in the field of energy conservation, water conservation, the use of renewable energy sources, wastewater treatment, waste prevention and separate collection, and the introduction of environmental criteria in procurement.

Communities, especially Orthodox and Catholic ones, should pay increased attention to solving the problem of using plastic flowers, plastic religious paraphernalia and try to minimize the presence of such things in the community.

In order to minimize the negative impact on the natural environment and prevent conflict situations between the religious community and the residents of the area where the temple is planned to be built (when it is planned to be located on the existing green area), it is necessary to develop and implement internal environmental principles that would regulate this sensitive area .

Working with believers

Most parishioners are probably not aware of the relationship between religious values and the personal need to care for nature and implement the principles of environmental friendliness in their lives. Environmental issues are perceived rather as external, imposed from the outside, not related to the internal life of communities or religion as a whole. Therefore, it will be useful to develop religious-ecological manuals, online courses, podcasts, tips and recommendations for classes with youth, children and interested believers that will help people change their lifestyle in accordance with religious principles of caring for nature on a personal level.

Participation of churches and believers in solving the environmental problems of society.

It is important to encourage the environmental service of believers and initiate their participation in practical activities, such as garbage collection in green areas, planting forest trees, and in the creation of educational environmental projects, such as ecological hiking trails and ecological routes. It is especially important that such support and initiative come from the clergy.

It is worth dwelling on a few more points, which also relate to the issue of a systematic approach.

The sustainability of environmental projects in religious communities largely depends on the availability of human and financial resources of the community. Many communities in Belarus are ready to partially cover the costs and contribute to the implementation of environmental projects (for example, organizing ecological trails in Orthodox communities), but most communities are not currently ready to financially invest in environmental projects, especially those that are just being planned. Therefore, in general, there is a need to initiate internal church discussions on opportunities to attract resources to support environmental activities.

Another point is the interconfessional opportunities in the environmental activities of religious organizations in Belarus. Almost all representatives of religious organizations with whom meetings were held in the preparation of this review see the potential in

Representatives of various Christian denominations and Jewish communities during the seminar “The contribution of religions to environmental education in the family and school” with representatives of various religions in Belarus, Minsk, 2022



⁷⁴ The Interreligious Working Circle (IWC) was established in 1997 as part of the Belarusian-German projects at the Minsk International Educational Center named after Johannes Rau. It includes Orthodox, Catholics, Lutherans, Evangelical Christians-Baptists, representatives of Jewish religious associations, and Muslims.

⁷⁵ [Seminar “The contribution of religions to environmental education in the family and school”](#): [Electronic resource] // Minsk International Educational Center named after Johannes Rau. (Date of access: 01.11.2022).

⁷⁶ [Religion and Society](#): [Electronic resource] // Minsk International Educational Center named after Johannes Rau. (Date of access: 01.11.2022).

interconfessional participation in the implementation of environmental projects, and all of them participate in interconfessional meetings and seminars at the Johannes Rau Minsk International Education Center. On the platform of the center, environmental meetings and seminars are held for representatives of different confessions and religions, joint environmental actions: cleaning the territory of temples, planting trees, cleaning cemeteries, and so on. In 2021, the interreligious working circle⁷⁴ held a seminar “The Contribution of Religions to Environmental Education in the Family and School”⁷⁵, and in 2022 a series of seminars under the general theme “Culture and Religion. Dialogue in the 21st century. Such meetings, according to the organizers of the seminars, are caused by the need to look for new resources to solve environmental problems and implement the sustainable development goals and the 2030 Agenda. The interreligious working circle includes 12 representatives of Christian denominations and Jewish organizations⁷⁶. The meetings are regularly attended by representatives of Muslim communities. It is important that religious communities are ready and open to the development of environmental activities to the best of their ability.



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