

# changing church

CLIMATE CHANGE

10 KEY POINTS

FROM OUR RESEARCH



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## CLIMATE CHANGE

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Challenged, frustrated but hopeful – these three words help to capture UK evangelicals' response to climate change.

**After surveying 907 church leaders and members, 98 per cent of participants agreed that the Bible teaches them to care about God's creation, but 84 per cent of church leaders don't believe that their church is doing enough to address climate change.**

So, while there was widespread agreement that climate change should be an important issue for Christians, questions were raised about where it sits as a priority in our churches.

Understanding climate change as a pivotal gospel issue of our time, and creation care as an amazing opportunity to share good news, could be the key for some churches knowing how, and why, to take action.

With billions of people identifying as religious worldwide, there is no doubt that encouraging and empowering faith groups to care for the earth is an important step in promoting global action on climate change and a better future for us all.

The Evangelical Alliance aims to represent its members in their work on climate change, and to support them to live more sustainably. To do this well, it is important to understand what the current attitudes of church members and leaders are on this issue.

The research took the form of two online surveys, one for church members and one for church leaders. In total, we had a sample size of 907.



722

Church member  
responses

185

Church leader  
responses

Participants were recruited through a variety of methods. The survey links were sent to members of the Evangelical Alliance through its email newsletters as well as posted on its social media platforms, where they were shared further by several organisations, including Tearfund, A Rocha, Christian Aid and others. This enabled people across the UK to access the survey. The participants were self-selecting.

The survey was conducted in May 2021, when the UK was still under pandemic restrictions. The data will therefore be somewhat limited, as many churches were still unable to meet for in-person gatherings, so it is more difficult to assess what churches may or may not have been doing to address climate change.

We can see from the survey that many evangelical Christians grasp the connection between their faith and climate change and so understand that it is an important issue. It is clear, however, that this understanding often doesn't result in action within the life of the church.

The Evangelical Alliance believes that caring for creation is a key gospel issue, an opportunity to worship, witness and seek justice for our neighbour, because the good news of Jesus is about the renewal of all things. We hope this research will help empower our members to respond to the climate crisis, equipping them with tools and ideas as well as signposting to Christian experts in the field.

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In recent years we've seen a shift towards individuals, businesses and governments becoming more aware of the impact of their actions on the environment. I was interested to learn more about the attitudes of church leaders and members across the UK towards creation care, as I believe that there is a strong Biblical mandate to care for God's creation and show compassion to His people around the world. I was delighted with the response from the Evangelical Alliance and their members and am encouraged by what the research has found. I'm looking forward to seeing how the research can be used to encourage and empower Christians to take action and remain hopeful about the impact that the church can have to protect and steward God's creation."

**– Rachael Thomas**

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## 10 key points from our research

**No 1** **The three words that best described individual's attitude to climate change are challenged, frustrated, and hopeful.** The survey found that when asked to choose which three words out of a selection of 16 best described the individual's attitude to climate change, challenged, frustrated, and hopeful were ranked as the top three choices for both church leaders and church members. This suggests we are in a moment where we know change needs to happen but are unsure of what that should look like.

**No 2** **Ninety-eight per cent of both church leaders and members agreed that the Bible teaches them to care about God's creation.** The survey found that attitudes towards addressing climate change in the lives of individuals were very similar between church leaders and church members. Eighty-three per cent of church members and 87 per cent of church leaders agree that their actions contribute to climate change, with 75 per cent of church members and 78 per cent of church leaders indicating that they are already taking action to address climate change.

The survey found a slight variation in the attitudes towards the relationship between climate change and faith between church leaders and church members. Ninety-one per cent of church leaders indicated

that their faith underpins their concern for the environment, whereas only 84 per cent of church members agreed. An overwhelming majority in both groups (98 per cent), however, agreed that the Bible teaches them to care for God’s creation, which is great news.

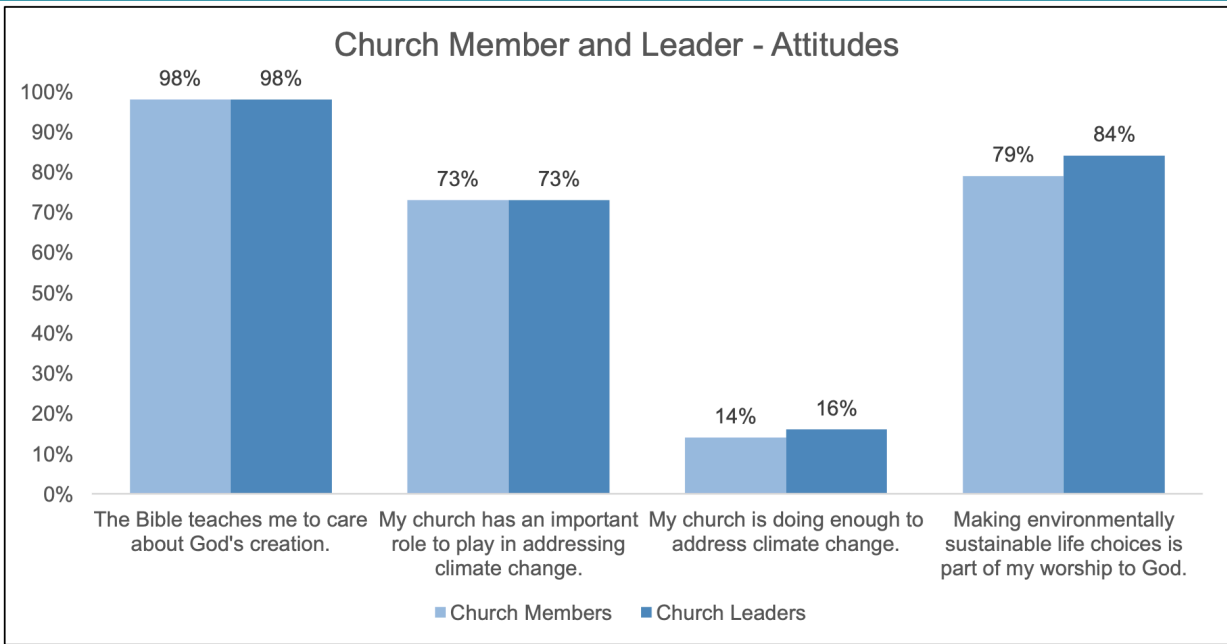


Figure 1: A graph to show the percentages of church members and church leaders that agreed or strongly agreed with the statements below.

**No 3** Churches are not doing enough to respond to climate change. Seventy-three per cent of both church leaders and members agreed that the church has an important role to play in addressing climate change. Only 14 per cent of church members and 16 per cent of church leaders agree that their church is doing enough, however. When such a large percentage agree that creation care is something the Bible teaches, yet such a low figure think their church is doing enough, it is clear that something that needs to change.

## No 4

**We are taking action in our personal lives.** The survey found that similar percentages of church members and church leaders have taken steps in their lives to reduce their environmental impact. Seventy-five per cent of church members and 78 per cent of church leaders say they have recycled more in the last year; 52 per cent and 57 per cent respectively have eaten less meat; and just over 50 per cent of both groups have walked or used public transport more in the last year. This demonstrates that climate change is an important issue to Christians and that they're prepared to take steps to make a positive difference.

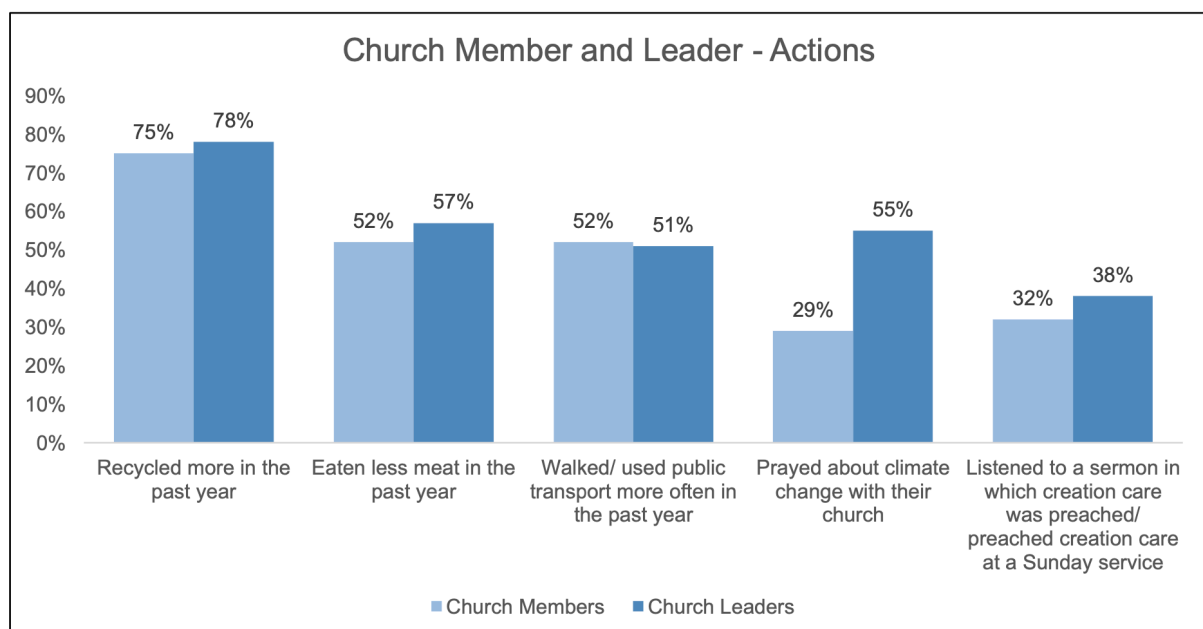


Figure 2: A graph to show the percentages of church members and church leaders that indicated they had carried out the actions below in the past year.

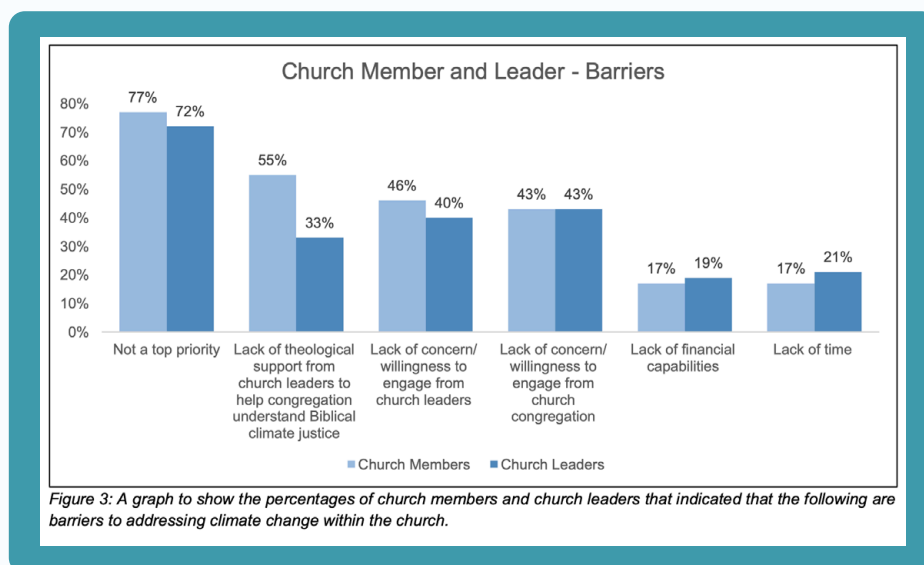
## No 5

**Climate change should be addressed more often at church.** The survey found that a considerably lower percentage of church members indicated that they have prayed about climate change with their church (<26 per cent) than church leaders. A slightly lower percentage of church members indicated they have listened to a sermon in which creation care was preached (<6 per cent), compared with the percentage of church leaders who indicated that they had preached creation care at a Sunday service. According to the survey, 62 per cent of church leaders have not preached about creation care in the last year.

Both church members and leaders indicated that there is a disconnect between their personal thoughts on creation care, and how the church responds to climate change both in words and action. Both groups agreed the church should be doing more. One respondent commented, “There is too much disconnect in how we operate and think/talk about this topic. We need to encourage better conversations. The church is often at the heart of our communities where this could be happening.”

## No 6

**Climate change is not seen as a priority in church.** The survey found that the barriers to addressing climate change within the church were similar between church members and church leaders. Seventy-seven per cent of church members and 72 per cent of church leaders indicated that the biggest barrier is that climate change is not considered to be a priority within the church. Lack of financial capabilities and lack of time were ranked as the smallest barriers for both church members and leaders.



## No 7

**We need more theological understanding.** The biggest difference between church members and leaders when indicating barriers to addressing climate change was that 55 per cent of church members felt that there is a “lack of theological support from church leaders to help the congregation understand biblical climate justice”, compared to only 33 per cent of church leaders.



# No 8

## All ages agree that creation care is a form of worship.

The survey found that church-member attitudes to climate change do not vary greatly between age groups 18–34, 35–54 and 55–74 year olds but do vary slightly for the 75+ years. The percentage of respondents who agree that the Bible teaches them to care about God’s creation is 98 per cent or 99 per cent across all ages.

The greatest variation across the ages was found when asked if their church has an important role to play in addressing climate change. Eighty-one per cent of 18-34 year olds agreed, gradually decreasing across the age groups, with just 62 per cent of the 75+ group agreeing. There was a similar correlation across the age groups when asked if their church was doing enough to address climate change, with only 7 per cent agreeing in the 18-34s, compared to 21 per cent in the 75+.

This still means, however, that at least 79 per cent of participants across the ages agree that their churches should be doing more about climate change.

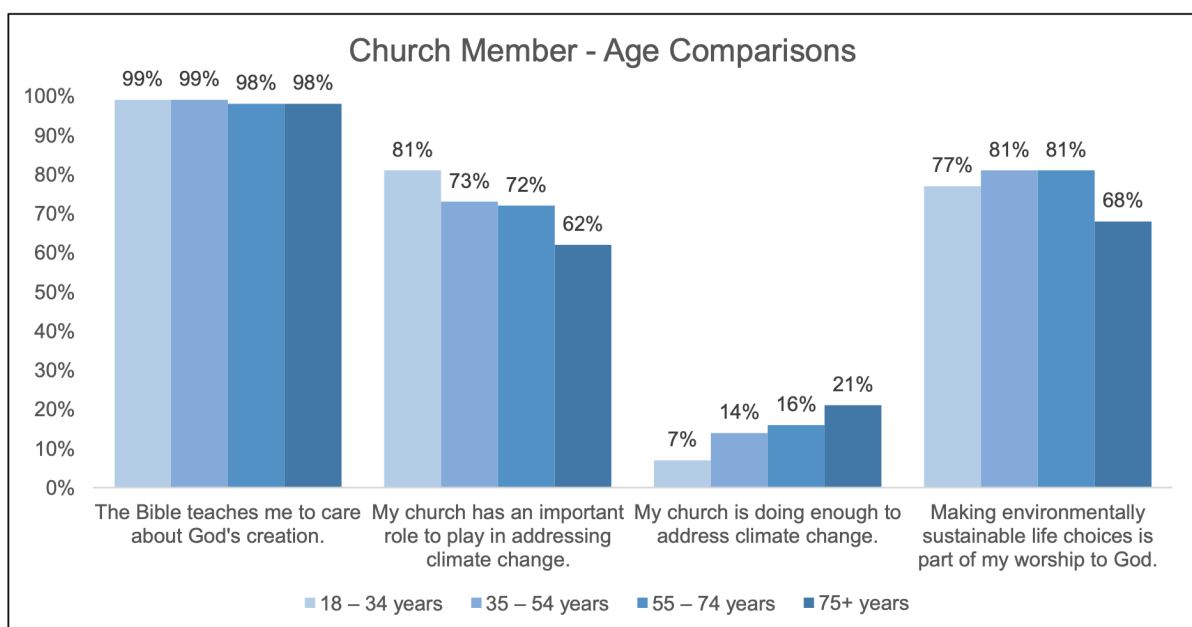


Figure 4: A graph to show the percentages of church members that agreed with the statements below, arranged by age group.

# No 9

**All UK nations agree that the Bible teaches creation care.** The survey found that church member attitudes to climate change do not vary greatly between the regions, although some slight differences have been observed.

The percentage of respondents who agree that their church has an important role to play in addressing climate change is similar in Northern Ireland, Scotland and England but decreases considerably (by 16–19 per cent) for Welsh respondents.

The percentage of respondents who believe that their church is doing enough to address climate change is similar across all regions, although lowest in Scotland and Northern Ireland, with only 10 per cent agreeing with the statement.

The percentage of respondents who believe that making environmentally sustainable life choices is part of their worship to God is similar for England and Wales, at 83 per cent and 88 per cent respectively. This decreases by 11–16 per cent for Scottish respondents and further (by 15–20 per cent) for Northern Ireland.

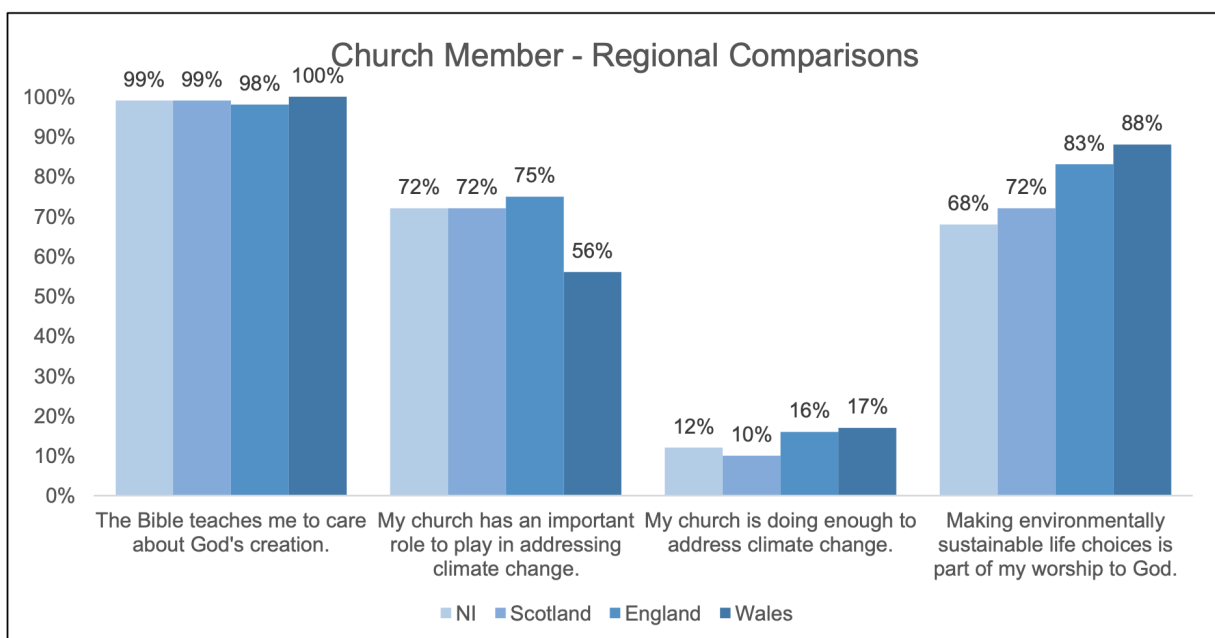


Figure 5: A graph to show the percentages of church members that agreed with the statements below, arranged by region.

# No 10

Respondents from inner-city locations were more likely to think that the church has an important role to play in addressing climate change. The survey found that church member attitudes to climate change vary slightly between the inner-city, suburban and rural locations.

The percentage of respondents who agree that their church has an important role to play in addressing climate change is highest in the inner-city areas. This drops by 13 per cent for suburban respondents and falls by a further 6 per cent, to just over two-thirds, in the rural regions.

The percentage of respondents who believe that their church is doing enough to address climate change is lowest in the inner-city region. This increases by 10 per cent for the suburban respondents and increases further, to almost one fifth, for rural respondents.

The percentage of respondents who believe that making environmentally sustainable life choices is part of their worship to God is similar in the inner-city and suburban areas, at 83 per cent and 80 per cent, and drops slightly, to approximately 75 per cent, in the rural regions.

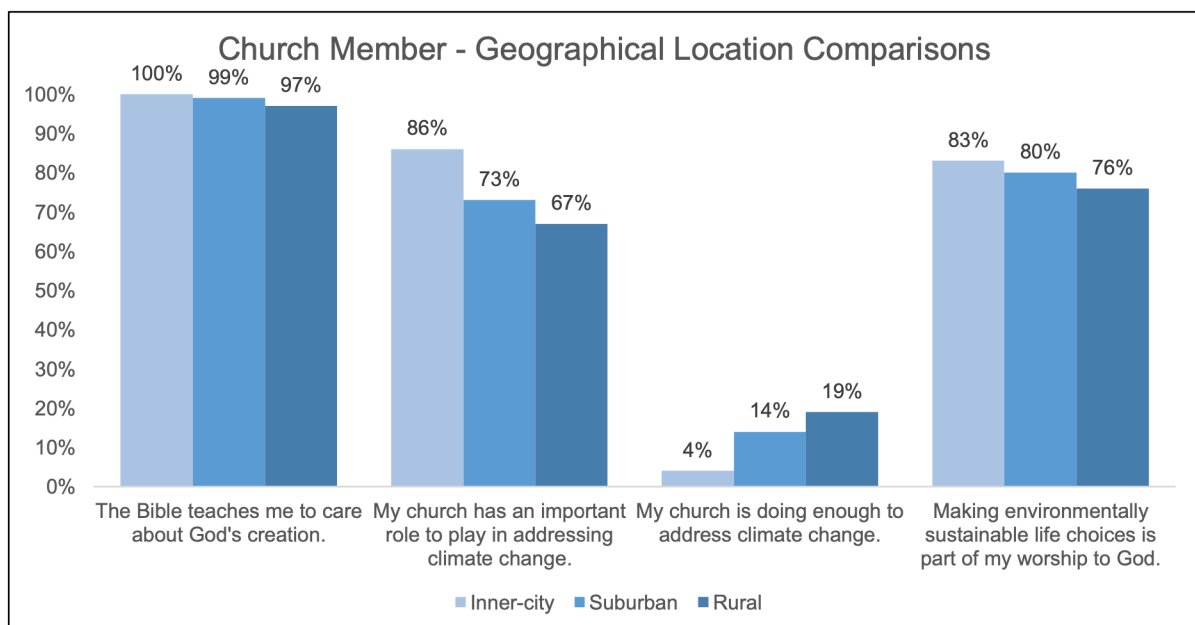


Figure 6: A graph to show the percentages of church members that agreed with the statements below, arranged by geographical location.

*Thank you to Rachael Thomas who conducted the research and also to our friends at A Rocha, Christian Aid and Tearfund who helped shape and share the survey.*

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