

Climate Adaptation

What is Climate Adaptation?

This is the process of adapting our buildings to the current and future impacts of climate change, such as flooding or heatwaves. You may also hear it linked with climate resilience, which is the capacity to cope with and recover from these impacts. Both climate adaptation and climate resilience also apply to communities- are they ready to deal with climate change impacts and what role do churches have in supporting communities?

Why should churches get involved?

The Methodist Church has an aspirational target to reach Net Zero. The process of reducing and preventing carbon emissions to reach Net Zero is known as climate mitigation. For more on reducing your church's carbon emissions, see the [Getting your Building down to Net Zero pages](#).

Adaptation therefore goes a step beyond mitigation, by acknowledging that climate change impacts are already occurring, and we need to prepare our buildings and communities for these.

While climate adaptation isn't part of the Methodist Church's aspirational Net Zero target, churches may want to engage with this work for a number of reasons.

1. The cost of inaction is greater than the cost of action. If we make changes to our buildings now, it minimises the risk of damage caused by climate change later, saving money in the long run.
2. We're a justice seeking church- justice that enables everyone, and all creation, to flourish. Our communities cannot flourish if they are not adapted and resilient to climate change and we have a role to play in supporting them.
3. Protecting heritage- we have a responsibility to protect our buildings, which are often of historical significance and are important to local communities.

What conditions do we need to adapt our buildings to and how do we do it?

[The Met Office projects](#) the UK will see warmer and wetter winters, hotter and drier summers and more frequent and intense weather extremes as a consequence of the changing climate. These are therefore the conditions our buildings need to be adapted to.

One of the first things to do is ensure you have a maintenance plan for the church and carry this out. For example, keeping rainwater goods clear will help the church cope with intense rainfall, preventing water ingress and the subsequent problems this causes. Longer term, you may also need to replace your rainwater goods with larger ones, to cope with

increased rainfall. Undertaking regular maintenance and monitoring if harder changes are needed makes adaptation an ongoing process.

For churches classed as high flood risk, you may want to use sandbags to protect the church entrance or opt to install flood protection boards at doorways. Please ensure you have the necessary Consents before any installation takes place.

To check your flood risk;

- Use the [gov.uk checker](#) for England
- In Wales, use the [National Resources Wales checker](#)
- Use the [SEPA checker](#) in Scotland

For churches at low flood risk themselves, but near areas of high flood risk, you may want to open your building as a base for emergency services or a refuge for those displaced by flooding. Before you do this, consider if the building can cope with large numbers of people, potentially for multiple days- do you have enough space for them to sleep, enough toilets, and large enough kitchen facilities?

Historic churches often stay cool during heatwaves due to thick walls and high ceilings, (such as [St Mary's Ellenbrook](#)) enabling them to act as cool spaces for their local communities. Churches can register for this purpose with their Local Authority, as they do in winter as Warm Spaces. For modern buildings, where overheating is more likely, consider;

- Installing or improving roof insulation, which will keep the church cooler during heatwaves and warmer in winter
- Adding window blinds, to prevent direct sunlight exposure
- Create ventilation or through draughts, without the use of aircon

The Urban Heat Island effect refers to the phenomenon of urban areas being 5-10°C warmer than surrounding rural areas. Green spaces, and in particular tree cover, can help reduce heat in cities through shade and increased evaporative cooling. Church land could be greened to provide cool spaces in urban areas, which will also help to reduce air pollution and will benefit biodiversity.

Further guidance

[The National Trust's Climate Hazards Map](#) helps to identify future climate risks in your area.

[Historic England](#) has guidance on improving resilience through adaptation for historic buildings.

[Case studies of climate resilient churches](#) can be found on the Church of England's website.

[Methodist Insurance's maintenance checklist](#) can be used if you don't already have one.