

## Environmental Work of Austrian Christian Churches

In 1982 Edeltraud Buchberger of the Diocese Linz was the pioneer of the environmental work of Austrian Churches, where she published the journal “Mensch und Umwelt” (Mankind and Environment) and trained the first so-called Umwelt-Pfarrgemeinderäte (environmental parish councillors). In 2000 the **environmental delegates of the Austrian dioceses** started a regular joint conference, where they meet twice a year for exchange and planning. The environmental delegates work **ecumenically**. Hemma Opis-Pieber from the Diocese Graz-Seckau is the current speaker of what is now called the **Konferenz der Kirchlichen Umweltbeauftragten Österreichs** (Conference of Environmental Delegates of the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Austria).

One main ecumenical Austria-wide project is **Autofasten**, run annually since 2003, where participants commit themselves to partially or totally abstain from car driving during the Lenten period – and from this experience hopefully afterwards as well. In 2018, around 17.500 such voluntary abstainers saved about 10,5 million kilometers of driving and hence about 2.500 tons of carbon dioxide. [www.autofasten.at](http://www.autofasten.at)

Another important project is **EMAS** (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme), promoted since 2006. It provides environmental management support and audit for parishes and Christian organizations (like catholic schools, providers of continuing education, hospitals run by religious orders). Currently about 30 Austrian ecclesial organizations are EMAS-certified. [www.schoepfung.at/site/home/presse](http://www.schoepfung.at/site/home/presse)

After Pope Francis published the groundbreaking Encyclical Laudato Si’ in May 2015, the Catholic **Austrian Bishop’s Conference adopted three important “environmental goals”** in a landmark decision in November 2015:

- sustainability guidelines for all dioceses,
- accelerated energy transition, and
- eco-social purchasing and land-use.

Sustainability guidelines: many German-speaking dioceses have already prepared „sustainability guidelines“, in Austria by now eight dioceses adopted such guidelines. These guidelines serve as a compass and corrective, in order to respect the aspect of responsibility for the creation in all areas of diocese activities. They therefore are an important basis for „ecological transformation“ in the spirit of Laudato Si’. Energy transition, e.g. by developing a climate protection and energy strategy and appropriate implementation tools for each diocese.

The environmental delegates of the nine Austrian Dioceses now work with excitement and diligence, jointly with diocese staff and **many active volunteers in the parishes**, on the fulfillment of these ambitious goals.

For more information on what we do please visit our website [www.schoepfung.at](http://www.schoepfung.at)

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