Footsteps Working Paper

Sacred Spaces, Resilient Places: Places of Worship as Centres for Climate Adaptation and Community Resilience –

Protecting and supporting healthy communities

Dr Naomi Bennet-Steele

Noami is an interdisciplinary researcher working with Footsteps, with experience in facilitating co-design processes and participatory exploration of systems dynamics around materials, health and place-based community work.

She is a Barrow Cadbury Trust Freelance Learning Partner and until recently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Surrey and has worked for Asthma + Lung UK

Acknowledgements

This report builds on the Footsteps report 'SACRED SPACES, RESILIENT PLACES - an Investigation by BCU Architecture and Design Students into Six Places of Worship as Centres for Climate Adaptation and Community Resilience', authored by Ma. Angella C. Del Mundo, Maryam Alatmane, Mehtaab Kaur and Quinthia Nsema (2026), and the accompanying Climate Adaptation and Resilience Framework.

Funding support for the SACRED SPACES, RESILIENT PLACES investigation was provided by the WMCA, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funded BiFCAP collaboration between Bahu Trust, Footsteps and Ashden Climate Solution and Footsteps' own charitable funds.

Footsteps
Faiths for a Low Carbon Future

BCF
BIRMINGHAM COUNCIL OF FAITHS

Printed by Central England Quakers on re-cycled (off-white) paper

Summary of key recommendations

For Places of Worship:

- Explore partnerships with local GP surgeries or Primary Care Networks and Integrated Care Boards around community service delivery and emergency planning
- Consider the nutritional balance of food being served or distributed at places of worship and create a plan for food supply disruption
- Encourage congregation members to use active travel to get to the place of worship
- Use or develop resources that draw inspiration from the natural world for use in worship
- Create spaces and faith-based resources to help process loss, grief and anxiety due to climate breakdown
- Meaningfully engage in interfaith relationship building and actions of solidarity when tensions rise

For public health teams and healthcare providers:

- Designate one or more points of contact who can be in regular dialogue with faith communities and build potential partnerships
- Communicate clearly what support is available for places of worship who want to start or increase their health-related provision
- Include faith groups in emergency planning

Aims and Background

The climate emergency is a health emergency, as exemplified by the recurrent heatwaves throughout the Summer of 2026 which have led to nearly 3000 excess deaths nationally (and counting)[i] and in the West Midlands, recurrent wildfires which have directly threatened the lives of residents and firefighters[ii], and contributed to poor air quality across the region. The direct and indirect impacts of climate change are increasingly threatening human life and health, making any actions for climate adaptation and resilience 'health' actions. However, many of the actions necessary to cut carbon emissions (mitigation) and create resilience against climate breakdown (adaptation) have health benefits above and beyond helping to prevent the worst impacts of climate events[iii].

> "*Taking action on climate change is the biggest health opportunity of our lifetime. Policies on clean air, active travel, warm homes and plant-rich diets will cut emissions and disease together*" –
> **Professor Hugh Montgomery OBE, National Emergency Briefing**

The aim of this supplementary report is to identify the relationship between measures highlighted in Footsteps' climate adaptation and resilience report and framework (see Appendix 2) , and the health outcomes of the communities involved. As mentioned in the

original report, places of worship and faith institutions have a role in advocacy around 'intersectional injustices such as fuel poverty, health inequalities, and housing deprivation' – all of which sit at the intersection between climate and health. In addition to the identified faith basis for climate care, such as "khalifahs" In Islam, "creation care" in Christianity or "sewa" (selfless service) in Sikhism, many religious traditions and scriptures call for care of those who are sick, vulnerable or grieving, and there are strong traditions of places of worship and faith communities providing aid and medical care, particularly for those who would not be able to access other forms of these services.

The report also identifies how 'places of worship act as vital support systems, addressing socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities in their communities. By leveraging physical and social assets, places of worship can provide core services such as food distribution, localised energy efficiency advice and Warm Welcome Spaces (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager, 2013)'. Each of these named interventions has a direct health benefit, and could provide essential aid for those made more vulnerable to climate impacts due to pre-existing health concerns.

The hope is that this will be a 'working paper' – a starting point for greater conversation and exploration of these themes, and that the recommendations will continue to be developed based on the 'on the ground' experience of different place of worship and faith communities.

Methods and approach

This report looks at –

What <u>specific</u> role can Places of Worship play in protecting and improving health as we experience climate breakdown, potentially above and beyond other community groups?

With a focus on:

1. **Supporting people to improve their baseline health to help them to be more resilient to climate impacts**

2. **The Spiritual Leadership offered by places of worship and faith communities mitigating some of the health impacts of climate effects**

Starting from an understanding of the primary and secondary impacts of climate breakdown on health (Appendix 1), a literature search was conducted to find grey and peer-reviewed sources that examine the specific contribution of faith communities and places of worship to a community's climate adaptation and resilience and the related health factors. Much is written about the role of community organisations more generally, but the focus of this report is the unique contributions that places of worship and faith communities can make.

The strengths that faith communities have in both responding to the climate crisis and supporting the health of their communities are:

- understanding of their people and their cultures,
- the trust people hold in them as sources of information and guidance,
- their ability to support people to process complex emotions and find resilience, and,
- the fundamental tenets many faiths share to care for each other, particularly the vulnerable.

Supporting people to improve their baseline health can help them to be more resilient to climate impacts. This could include:

- ***Access to health services***

Health interventions that are delivered in collaboration with faith communities and places of worship can be more effective than those delivered in clinical settings alone, due to the ability of such collaborations to ensure delivery is more inclusive and culturally sensitive[iv],[v]. Examples include:

- GP/Nurse 'drop in' sessions
- Vaccination Q+A sessions
- Pre and post-natal support groups
- Weight-loss support groups
- Substance misuse recovery groups (faith element can be particularly important here)
- Medical advocacy and translation services

But other examples may be more relevant to different contexts and demographics. Public Health and health service use data can be a useful tool for deciding what support may be most relevant in a particular area.

Where program or service provision like this isn't possible, faith community members could instead join the patient panels of their local GPs to provide input in that way.

Climate impact: Health is complex, and many health inequalities are due to overlapping environmental and social factors but helping people to receive relevant care is one way to improve health outcomes. When people engage with primary healthcare and get support to manage their health, it makes it less likely that they will end up in emergency care. This can take some of the pressure off emergency services, leaving capacity in the system for when extreme weather events occur.

Example: COVID-19 Legacy

In many ways, preventing the worst health impacts of climate breakdown and supporting those most vulnerable to those impacts will involve actions and approaches not dissimilar to those that were adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Faith Action's report entitled 'First In, Last Out: How faith groups supported and partnered with NHS services during the pandemic and what this means for the future of health and care partnerships'[vi] highlights how faith groups were providing support around health and medical care prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how that support adapted and increased in response to the pandemic. Actions include:

- Providing transport to and from healthcare
- Contacting healthcare services on behalf of people
- Assisting with telephone/digital consultations
- Providing out-of-hospital support/home visiting
- Delivering medication
- Delivering food
- Providing spiritual/pastoral support
- Providing mental health/wellbeing support
- Facilitating volunteering or mutual aid
- Supplying PPE
- Health education/tackling misinformation
- Supporting vaccination programmes

One example of many such partnerships that arose through the covid response was between the City of Wolverhampton Council and Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara, Sedgley Street, who piloted asymptomatic community lateral flow testing before such tests became widely available[vii].

When responding to the climate crisis as a health crisis, faith groups can learn from the challenges and successes they experienced during Covid, and should ask for the support and resourcing they need from Public Health teams, Primary Care Networks or Integrated Care Boards to provide community level support.

- ***Diet***

Many faith communities hold traditions that involve food and communal eating, or religious laws about how food should be prepared, what can and can't be consumed, and when. This can make some dieting or nutritional advice culturally inappropriate or insensitive. On the other hand, the trust people have in their faith community and the emotional support they receive can help them when trying to make dietary changes for their health. Faith communities and places of worship can support healthy diets and nutrition through:

  - Adapting/developing healthy eating resources to be more culturally relevant (with trained professionals where possible), including cooking demonstrations and recipe sharing
  - Healthy food distribution, either within religious services, ceremonies and festivals or through community cafes and food banks. Even better if this food can be sourced locally, building relationships with and financially supporting local suppliers

- Using outdoor (or even indoor, where appropriate) space for food growing

Climate impact: One of the best things people can do to reduce carbon emissions is consume less meat, which is often also the healthier choice. In addition, our food systems will likely need to become much more localised to have some resilience against global disruption, which can also reduce the emissions associated with transporting the food. Places of worship can be a key enabler and supporter of local food production networks, creating a more sustainable food economy.

- ***Physical activity***

The regularity of many religious practices (e.g. having a holy day) supports the building of routines. This creates an opportunity to introduce regular exercise into this routine, and increases the likelihood of it being maintained. Physical activity can be supported by:

- Holding exercise groups – these can be before or after religious meetings, or even incorporated into services as spiritual practices
- Encouraging active travel (could include bike confidence courses, bike maintenance, bike parking, or walking buses)
- Creating and maintaining green spaces, or 'sponsoring' a local green space where the PoW does not have grounds (litter picking, removing invasive plants, etc)

Climate impact: Reducing car dependency is key to reducing our emissions (which has the added health benefit of improving air quality) and increased mobility can help people to manage better in emergencies. Physical activity is also often outdoors and can reinforce our connection to nature. This does also mean that it can be disrupted by weather events, so activities supporting exercise may benefit from contingency planning, including covid-style online classes.

The Spiritual Leadership offered by places of worship and faith communities could play a specific role in mitigating the health impacts of climate effects:

- ***Awe and wonder:***

Connecting with and experiencing the beauty of nature has multiple mental and physical health benefits[viii]. Our belief systems can support engagement with nature and build a sense of identity and purpose in roles as nature stewards or protectors.

Practical steps that communities can take include:

- Creating resources and leading activities where enagement with nature is encouraged, connecting this to known religious texts, practices or rituals
- Managing the buildings and grounds at places of worship with maximum care and benefit for the ecosystem
- Reinforcing the connection between religious identity and climate-care/eco-action with a sense of pride and purpose (as opposed to guilt)

Example: Morning mantra (Hindu):

"samudravasane devi parvatastanamaṇḍale / viṣṇupatni namastubhyaṃ pādasparśaṃ kṣamasva me."

"O, Mother Earth, / Draped by oceans, adorned with mountains and jungles…. / Forgive me for stepping upon you with my feet."

Author Dheepa R. Maturi reflects[ix] on how re-adopting the ritual of speaking this mantra before stepping foot on the ground each morning has reconnected her to the Earth as Mother and home, and the responsibilities that relationship brings.

- ***Processing Loss:***

Climate breakdown is being witnessed, experienced and anticipated both locally and globally, and this can have long-term emotional consequences[x]. Faith, religious and spiritual traditions can provide a framework for people to process grief and anger associated with experienced and anticipated loss due to climate breakdown. Having these tools has profound mental health benefits for individuals and helps increase resilience to traumatic events[xi].

Practical steps that communities can take include:

- Adapting exisiting grief frameworks and rituals to support with climate grief
- Increasing awareness of what support is available within religious traditions or external services for those experiencing grief or anxiety, whether this is attributable to climate events or otherwise
- Creating groups and spaces for people to process climate grief and anxiety in community with one another
- Pihkala's[xii,xiii] research into Climate Grief, Guilt, and Anger in Religious Communities highlights how religious communities may be well-equipped to process grief and guilt, but may have difficulty working with anger. Their research highlights the importance of working with anger in a constructive way that encourages positive action, rather than destructive action or hopelessness. Practices such as lament, which can work with both grief and anger, can be a helpful tool.

Example: The Hadith of the Sapling (Islam)

"If the Hour comes while you have a sapling in your hand, then if you can plant it before it [the Hour] comes, plant it." - Musnad Aḥmad, no. 12902.

Dr. Jibran Khokhar's reflections on Islam and Climate Anxiety[xiv] draw attention to the hadith of the sapling, explaining 'At first glance, this seems illogical: Why plant a tree when the world is ending? But the Prophet ﷺ was teaching a deeper principle: that

believers must never allow fear of futility to immobilize them. Even in the face of ultimate destruction, action rooted in goodness for the sake of Allah retains its value'.

Example: Liturgy and litanies for climate lament (Hebrew Scriptures; Christian)

Often drawing inspiration from the book of Lamentations and the Psalms of lament, various liturgies and litanies have been developed on the themes of climate grief and anxiety, such as the Environment Confession by Sam Hargreeves[xv] and the collection of litanies and prayers of lament from GreenChristian[xvi]

- ***Advocating for people who have had to migrate due to climate breakdown:***

As different systems continue to break down, more people will migrate to the UK seeking security. Many policies and attitudes surrounding migration and asylum seeking are detrimental to health of those involved. People who arrive in the UK therefore need support for their mental and physical health.

- Faith communities may be the first port of call for many who newly arrive, and support should be made available to help people navigate the systems that contribute to their health, including housing, food and medical care.
- Faith communities can form sponsor networks, to support people to host climate refugees in their homes.
- Hostile environment policies such as 'No Recourse to Public Funds' can prevent people from accessing the healthcare they need, particularly when they are unclear as to what care they are entitled to. Faith communities can help people navigate these systems safely, and can also provide free community-based services 'in house' in partnership with local care providers.

- ***Protecting against conflict and violence:***

Instability across different essential systems can lead to increasing conflict and the outbreak of violence on a local, national or international level, which creates a direct threat to health and wellbeing. Faith communities, above and beyond other community groups, can play a role in peacebuilding.

- *Demonstrating relationship building and mutual aid within and between different faith communities can build resilience within the wider community, and present an alternative narrative to one of conflict and division.*
- *Faith communities can host training on de-escalation and conflict resolution, skills which are necessary for community resilience in times of crisis.*
- *The political weaponisation of race, migration and religion is increasing hostility towards racially minoritised groups, with impacts on mental and physical health. Faith communities (with adequate training and expertise – lived or professional) can provide support for the mental and emotional toll of these experiences.*
- *Faith groups who are majority white can step into allyship and solidarity roles, by building relationships with global majority faith communities and responding to*

the needs they express. In times of escalating violence this could include helping to protect places of worship where threats of violence have been received, and protecting homes and schools in communities at risk of being targeted.

- *For Christian communities – pushing back against violent narratives of Christian nationalism (tied to White nationalism) and providing resources to deal with hopelessness, fear and anger to reduce the chances of radicalisation.*

Example: Interfaith solidarity

Developed alongside the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Home Office, the Crown Prosecution Service, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the National Fire Chiefs' Council, guidance from The Inter Faith Network[xvii] provides practical steps that faith groups can take to support each other in times of rising tension, with the key areas being:

- Respond jointly–an attack on one is an attack on all
- Calm in times of tension
- Build on and strengthen existing good inter faith relations

Summary of key recommendations

For Places of Worship:

- Explore partnerships with local GP surgeries or Primary Care Networks and Integrated Care Boards around community service delivery and emergency planning
- Consider the nutritional balance of food being served or distributed at places of worship and create a plan for food supply disruption
- Encourage congregation members to use active travel to get to the place of worship
- Use or develop resources that draw inspiration from the natural world for use in worship
- Create spaces and faith-based resources to help process loss, grief and anxiety due to climate breakdown
- Meaningfully engage in interfaith relationship building and actions of solidarity when tensions rise

For public health teams and healthcare providers:

- Designate one or more points of contact who can be in regular dialogue with faith communities and build potential partnerships
- Communicate clearly what support is available for places of worship who want to start or increase their health-related provision
- Include faith groups in emergency planning

These key recommendations have been included in the Footsteps Adaptation and Resilience Framework as follows.

Strengthening Health and Well-Being

Activities that:	Specific Measures
Support people to improve their baseline health can help them to be more resilient to climate impacts	• Service delivery - Health interventions that are delivered in collaboration with faith communities and places of worship can be more effective than those delivered in clinical settings alone, due to the ability of such collaborations to ensure delivery is more inclusive and culturally sensitive • Diet - Faith communities and places of worship can support healthy diets and nutrition in ways that respect faith traditions and religious laws. • Physical activity - regularity of many religious practices (e.g. having a holy day) supports the building of routines. This creates an opportunity to introduce regular exercise into this routine and increases the likelihood of it being maintained.
Involve connecting with and experiencing the beauty of nature has multiple mental and physical health benefits.	• Creating resources and leading activities where engagement with nature is encouraged, connecting this to known religious texts, practices or rituals • Managing the buildings and grounds at places of worship with maximum care and benefit for the ecosystem

	• Reinforcing the connection between religious identity and climate-care/eco-action with a sense of pride and purpose (as opposed to guilt)
Help with processing loss	Practical steps that communities can take include: • Adapting existing grief frameworks and rituals to support with climate grief • Increasing awareness of what support is available within religious traditions or external services for those experiencing climate-related grief or anxiety • Creating groups and spaces for people to process climate grief and anxiety in community

APPENDIX 1

Climate impacts and their relationship to health

Direct and immediate health impacts of climate events:

- ***Heat waves***
  heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Pre-existing conditions can make people more vulnerable to the impacts of heat, and children or those over the age of 65 may find it harder to take the necessary actions to self-regulate.

- ***Wildfires***
  Prolonged periods of heat and drought can lead to wildfires, which can spread to homes and pose a risk to life (for the public and emergency responders like fire-fighters). The smoke generated by wildfires can spread to the surrounding area and poses a risk, particularly to those with pre-existing conditions. Wildfire smoke can prevent people from being able to open their windows for temperature regulation, which can contribute to heat stress.

- ***Wind/storms***
  High wind can lead to loss of life from falling trees and debris, in addition to property damage which can cause people to be displaced. Associated power loss can be a risk to life for those who depend on electricity for medical equipment, or cold exposure.

- ***Flooding/Landslides***
  Flash-flooding or landslides can lead to loss of life. Property damage can lead to people losing homes and businesses (and the associated security). Loss of electricity or clean water has direct health impacts. Loss of access to medical care.

- ***Medical emergencies***
  When a climate event is putting health services under intense strain, it becomes harder for people to access medical care, including emergency services. Not everyone may receive the care they need in times of intense pressure.

Any actions that reduce the likelihood and severity of the impacts of these events will have direct health benefits.

See: Adapted framework to include 'health benefits' column

Faith communities can also undertake emergency preparedness training and planning, with a focus on supporting those with health conditions that make them vulnerable. This could be supplemented with emergency first aid training.

Indirect impacts of recurrent climate events (system breakdown)

In addition to the weather events that we associate with climate change, the global instability these events cause will have further knock-on effects for things that dictate our health and wellbeing, including:

- *Drought – water quality and availability*

  Successive periods of drought may impact the amount and quality of drinking water available, leading to dehydration or water-borne diseases

- *Many places of worship have large roofs which will assist with collecting rainwater – can this be stored during wetter periods for emergency use? (this will also reduce the risk of localised flooding)*

- *Crop failures and food shortages*

  Lack of access to affordable and nutritious food can result in malnutrition (also civil unrest)

- *Many places of worship already have food banks or other food provision services. Can this infrastructure be adapted to work with the emergency plans of local / regional / national authorities to reduce disruption when food shortages occur?*

- *Places of worship that have grounds can introduce edible perennials (plants than you can eat that come back every year) as a source of food if other shortages occur. Note: this will not feed a whole community, but can help begin a conversation about resilient food systems and build food growing skills.*

- *Power failures (due to climate events and global oil and gas instability)*

  Loss of heating/cooling, communication failures and loss of power supply to medical devices are all a threat to health

- *Places of worship that have the space for power generation technologies such as solar panels or wind turbines may be able to produce electricity when other systems fail. This can be combined with an emergency stock of power banks for distribution in power outage. For health purposes, priority should be given to those who need electricity to run medical devices, and this should be incorporated into emergency planning.*

- *Housing crisis*

  As climate events compound, housing will be damaged or be proven unsuitable for the changing climate. Quality of housing is a key determinant of health.

- *People may need temporary accommodation, which the PoW could provide inside their building or could help organise through community networks.*

- *As key community stakeholders, faith communities should engage with planning processes in their area, to ensure any housing being built is suited to the changing climate, and that retrofit is given priority and funding, particularly for those whose quality of housing is already detrimental to their health.*

- *Job and income insecurity*

  People can't work in extreme weather, supply chains are disrupted, Industries shut down. 'Productivity' loss may also mean that different services cannot meet demand, including health services and utilities. Loss of income can push people into poverty, with health impacts.

- *Faith communities can show support for living wage schemes in their locality and assist/support workplace organising to protect workers rights*
- *Places of Worship can look to create jobs where possible, supporting people who cannot get other employment*
- *Where paid employment is not possible, offering volunteering opportunities can help provide a sense of purpose which is important for mental health*
- *Other existing poverty alleviation schemes (e.g. food banks) that help people meet basic needs will continue to be relied upon, so planning for higher demand on these services is important*

APPENDIX 2 - ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

BUILDING ADAPTIVE CAPACITY – enabling a community of faith to implement measures that create a resilient community ……. *These are mainly people-based involving community, relationships and systems-based approaches. Access to funds* **enables adaptation.**

Building Leadership and 'people capacity'

Activities that:	Specific measures
Faith and spiritual leadership	• 'Care for people, responsibility towards creation and service to others are deeply embedded within many religious traditions' • Integrate climate themes into sermons, study groups • Link to and join with Festivals
Encourage congregation's sustainable behaviours -	Make sustainability more human – not a technical matter • Eco Church and similar schemes have many practical actions of how congregation members can reduce carbon footprints • Cycling and walking initiatives e.g. Install secure bike parking to encourage low-carbon travel
Ownership by 'congregation' and action groups	• Enthusiastic congregation with a sense of empowerment. • Active 'green' groups

Becoming community intermediaries that local authorities trust and others can work with

Activities that:	Specific Measures
Develop relationships with key partners	• Obtain access to funding schemes, learn from others, build on each other's strengths • Provide trusted spaces where different organisations can meet and work together. KS TK • Build on relationships with local residents, community organisations, schools, charities and other faith communities. KS TK
Implementing Warm Homes and other schemes	• Help provide access to local communities • Bristol found that 'Local authorities will get much better results if they work with trusted community groups to deliver tailored, place-based approaches that are joined-up with investment in local delivery mechanisms and skills provision'

Financial resources and funding from within own community

Activities that:	Specific Measures
Build financial strength from within	• Congregational donations, fund raising activities
Seek funds from PoW's own wider faith community	• Some Churches and faith communities have their own funds for supporting their local PoWs
Identify place-based sources of funding	• Land-fill tax funding, local schemes, • Create toolkit wth specific suggestions

	• Use specialised fund-raising databases etc and professional fundraising support • Identifying and quantifying 'community benefit' helps unlock local authority and other funds

Strengthening Health and Well-Being

Activities that:	Specific Measures
Support people to improve their baseline health can help them to be more resilient to climate impacts	• Service delivery - Health interventions that are delivered in collaboration with faith communities and places of worship can be more effective than those delivered in clinical settings alone, due to the ability of such collaborations to ensure delivery is more inclusive and culturally sensitive • Diet - Faith communities and places of worship can support healthy diets and nutrition in ways that respect faith traditions and religious laws. • Physical activity - regularity of many religious practices (e.g. having a holy day) supports the building of routines. This creates an opportunity to introduce regular exercise into this routine and increases the likelihood of it being maintained.
Involve connecting with and experiencing the beauty of nature has multiple mental and physical health benefits.	• Creating resources and leading activities where engagement with nature is encouraged, connecting this to known religious texts, practices or rituals • Managing the buildings and grounds at places of worship with maximum care and benefit for the ecosystem • Reinforcing the connection between religious identity and climate-care/eco-action with a sense of pride and purpose (as opposed to guilt)
Help with processing loss	Practical steps that communities can take include: • Adapting existing grief frameworks and rituals to support with climate grief • Increasing awareness of what support is available within religious traditions or external services for those experiencing climate-related grief or anxiety • Creating groups and spaces for people to process climate grief and anxiety in community

ADAPTATION MEASURES - *practical changes you make to a building and community so it can cope with new climate conditions* ……. *Adaptation feeds into resilience. Resilience thinking helps ensure adaptation is holistic, not just technical fixes*

Adapting to warmer, wetter winters with more rainfall

Measures that:	Specific Measures
Addressing increased rainfall	• Ensure all gutters etc clear • Improved drainage and guttering • Replace hard surfaces with permeable paving • Rain gardens and appropriate planting to slow run off
Combating local flooding	• Build flood protections walls • Protect key electrical systems from ground-level water

Adapting to hotter, drier summers

Measures that:	Specific Measures
Prepare for heatwaves	• Block solar gain before enters building - Shutters, awnings, cool reflective roofs • Improve natural ventilation - Design for cross-ventilation and night-time purge ventilation to release accumulated heat • Cool rooms for vulnerable visitors • Plant shade-giving trees or climbers where possible

Adapting to extreme weather events

Measures that:	Specific Measures
Prepare for cold snaps	• Zonable heating • Create small warm-able space.
Prepare for storms & High Winds	• Eliminate hazards • Secure signage, bins, and outdoor furniture. Lightening protection • Inspect roof tiles, flashing, and fixings • Check trees for dead branches or instability

Retrofit - Increasing Faith Building Climate Resilience

Measures that:	Specific Measures
Make buildings warmer, healthier, and better able to cope with heatwaves, floods, and rising energy costs.	• Whole building energy audit. Access support from own faith group advisors • A quinquennial inspection is a good opportunity to reflect on the sustainability of the building and its use. • Consider adapting the building to allow greater community use • Considering how to increase resilience in the face of predicted changes to the climate, as well as increasing energy efficiency and considering other environmental issues. • Identify skills and experience – these gifts represent an important resource for building faith community resilience.
Improve Insulation and reduce heat loss in winter and help keep building cool in	• Upgrading windows • Enhanced insulation • Use of sustainable and resilient materials in construction where possible
Heating system	• Maintain boilers, pumps, electrics regularly • Assess age and vulnerability of heating system. • Contingency plans for heating systems failure • Smart heating systems • Explore renewable energy (solar PV, heat pumps)
Airtightness and ventilation	• Review ventilation and airtightness
Sustainable electricity generation	• Investigate suitability of roofs etc for generation. • Big Solar can give financial help with faith building projects • Battery storage can help reduce costs by flexible buying and enjoy lower tariffs

Grounds and Outdoor Spaces Adaptive Measures that increase resilience

Measures that	Specific Measures
Increase the potential for nature-based approaches to adaptation and resilience	• Create more natural grounds, outdoor spaces and graveyards that encouraging insect life etc. • Plant drought-resistant, pollinator-friendly species • Reduce mowing to support biodiversity • Add composting or food-growing areas • Create shaded outdoor seating • Encourage wildlife, respect bats and other protected species
Improve air quality	• Install air quality monitors • Time activities around periods during day of better air quality • Discourage car idling etc.

CLIMATE RESILIENT COMMUNITIES of FAITH with the ability to cope with and recover from climate shocks ……. *Resilience is the capacity of the building and the community to prepare for, absorb, respond to, and recover from climate shocks.* ……. *It's about functioning well despite disruption*

Developing PoW's ability to support their local communities at times of environmental or social stress

Measures that	**Specific Measures**
Involve creating an emergency plan and developing emergency resilience	• Create a simple emergency plan (heat, cold, flood, power cut) • Torches, blankets, first-aid kits accessible • Keyholders know how to shut off utilities
Support the local communities by acting as a local resilience centre	Community orientated activities • Community café • Warm / Cool space provision • Health and well-being support • Hold stocks of emergency supplies
Help develop and provide emergency response capacity by drawing on available skills and human resources	• Train volunteers in emergency response • Train stewards/wardens in emergency response • Tabletop planning exercise - Emergency Scenario Civil Unrest and Fire (see Faith Forum for London) to check preparedness, practise responding, work better with partners, build team capability
Insulate against power and communication outages	• Understand sub-station location and local infrastructure • staying open, safe, and supportive when power and communications losses occur.
Support vulnerable groups	• Map who may need extra support (elderly, isolated, asylum seekers) • Partner with local charities and neighbourhood groups Offer drop-ins, cafés, or wellbeing session

Being able to open as local hubs - heat refuges, flood shelters, power-cut spaces

Measures that	Specific Measures
Enable PoWs to act as a local warm/cool hub when needed	• Warm / Cool / Safe Spaces • Register as a warm space or cool space if appropriate • Provide water, seating, and accessible toilets • Ensure safeguarding and volunteer cover
Build on unique resilience advantages each faith tradition offers	• Churches — community halls, warm spaces • Mosques — strong mutual-aid networks • Gurdwaras — Langar: free meals at scale • Synagogues — strong governance & safeguarding • Hindu temples — community kitchens & volunteer energy • Buddhist temples — calm, wellbeing-supportive spaces • Quaker meeting houses — flexible, uncluttered spaces
Enable a PoW to act as a local community emergency coordinating hub	• A community-run space for coordinating mutual aid • A hub for local information and problem-solving • A link between the community and official responders • Flexible, spontaneous, empowering provision

REFERENCES

[i] UKHSA report shows 2,877 excess deaths caused by May and June heatwaves

[ii] Thomson, A., Four taken to hospital and homes damaged in West Midlands fires, The Guardian, 13 August 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/aug/13/several-homes-ablaze-as-firefighters-try-to-contain-west-midlands-grassfire

[iii] A. Sharifi, M. Pathak, C. Joshi, B. He, A systematic review of the health co-benefits of urban climate change adaptation, Sustainable Cities and Society, Volume 74, 2021, 103190, ISSN 2210-6707, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2021.103190.

[iv] DeHaven MJ, Hunter IB, Wilder L, Walton JW, Berry J. Health programs in faith-based organizations: are they effective? Am J Public Health. 2004 Jun;94(6):1030-6. doi: 10.2105/ajph.94.6.1030. PMID: 15249311; PMCID: PMC1448385.

[v] Mujong D, Pierce PAS, Green Hofer SA, Weil LG, Crosby-Nwaobi R, Husbands J, et al. Engaging with faith communities to tackle ethnic health inequalities in the UK: a scoping review. BMJ Public Health. 2026;4:e003816. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjph-2025-003816

[vi] Faith Action – First in, Last out: How faith groups supported and partnered with NHS services during the pandemic and what this means for the future of health and care partnerships. September 2022. https://www.faithaction.net/our-resources/first-in-last-out/

[vii] City of Wolverhampton Council – New COVID-19 testing pilot at city Gudwara https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/news/new-covid-19-testing-pilot-underway-city-gurdwara

[viii] Chang, Cc., Lin, B.B., Feng, X. et al. A lower connection to nature is related to lower mental health benefits from nature contact. Sci Rep 14, 6705 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-56968-5

[ix] https://lithub.com/a-planets-pain-on-healing-climate-grief-through-ritual-and-reverence/

[x] Comtesse H, Ertl V, Hengst SMC, Rosner R, Smid GE. Ecological Grief as a Response to Environmental Change: A Mental Health Risk or Functional Response? Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2021 Jan 16;18(2):734. doi: 10.3390/ijerph18020734. PMID: 33467018; PMCID: PMC7830022.

[xi] Lee SA, Gibbons JA, Bottomley JS. Spirituality Influences Emotion Regulation During Grief Talk: The Moderating Role of Prolonged Grief Symptomatology. J Relig Health. 2022 Dec;61(6):4923-4933. doi: 10.1007/s10943-021-01450-z.

[xii] Pihkala, P. Ecological Grief, Religious Coping, and Spiritual Crises: Exploring Eco-Spiritual Grief. Pastoral Psychol 74, 69–96 (2025). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-024-01158-3

[xiii] Pihkala, P. Engaging with Climate Grief, Guilt, and Anger in Religious Communities. Religions 2024, 15, 1052. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091052

[xiv] Khokhar, J., Islam and Climate Change: The Prophetic Cure to Eco-Anxiety, Yaqeen Institute, November 2025 https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/islam-and-climate-change-the-prophetic-cure-to-eco-anxiety

[xv] Hargreaves, S., Environment Confession https://engageworship.org/ideas/environment-confession

[xvi] Green Christian, Lamentation Prayers https://greenchristian.org.uk/lamentation-prayers/

[xvii] The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, Looking after one another: The safety and security of our faith communities, 2017 https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/looking-after-one-another-the-safety-and-security-of-our-faith-communities-2017