

Called to unity - Towards an ecology of relationships
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Green Fish: 15 years experience of a Christian ecological NGO

As the acting president of the NGO "Grüner Fisch" I would like to share some of our experiences from the past 15 years with you.

Grüner Fisch has been founded as a non-profit organization in Switzerland in 2008. Ever since, it has existed as a registered and tax-exempt association according to Swiss law. We are mostly active in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, in particular in the region around Bern.

Prior to its founding I and some other students of Christian students associations such as VBG (Vereinigte Bibelgruppen) in Zurich and Bern had been discussing how to address two issues worrying us: Climate change and global injustice. Our founding concept was to combine two aims: 1) Cut our non-sustainable over-consumption of natural resources at home in Switzerland and 2) support in developing countries aid projects that benefit both the local population and have a quantifiable ecological benefit. We were inspired by three aspects. The first was our personal knowledge of people who were part or even initiators of such development projects. Thus, we knew that with a relatively small financial effort (from a Swiss point-of-view) an NGO could provide better, cleaner cook stoves for an entire village in the Himalayas for instance. The second was and still is the urgency of the climate crisis and the ecological crisis in general: When I realized around 2007, e.g., that the coming generation might grow up without the experience of walking through snow or skating on frozen lakes, I felt anger, sadness and guilt. Ultimately, it was our belief that if we call ourselves Christians, we must do the will of God. But what is the will of God? Since the foundation of the Grüner Fisch, two Bible verses have been our guidance, and we still return to them every year at our general assemblies: Genesis 2,15 (NIV: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.") and Luke 10,27 (NIV: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'")

Highlights of the past 15 years

- Grüner Fisch exists for >15 years now. We have achieved quite some things with few resources.
- Hardly anyone in church fundamentally denies the importance of sustainability and that we as Christians should care for creation. There was progress on this over the last 15 years. One anecdote to illustrate this: Around 2007 I had a discussion with some friends in my community and one of them told us: "The sooner this world perishes, the better! For the sooner Jesus will return". I didn't hear a hint of irony in that statement. I haven't heard such utter denial within churches in the past few years. For the records how we at Grüner Fisch interpret the situation: The current ecological crisis is **NOT** God's will, this crisis is caused by our greed and stupidity, sacrificing

innocent creatures and plundering the natural resources away from the poor in the name of profit.

- We have exposure in Christian and secular media. See e.g. https://www.srf.ch/kultur/gesellschaft-religion/verein_gruener-fisch-wenn-ein-weltraumphysiker-mit-jesus-gegen-neophyten-kaempft

- A lot of collaborative action with Christian and secular organizations allow people from all ranges of society (members, friends) to get together and act together.

Lowlights

- We are stagnating at ~50 members for years

- Most churches are sympathetic to our goals but creation is one of many issues demanding their resources, so it can still be hard to obtain a long-term commitment for creation care from churches.

- General difficulty for NGOs (and any other club, community, etc.) to find volunteers. In this respect, time is more precious than money in Switzerland

- The global numbers (atmospheric CO₂-abundance, number of threatened species, other planetary boundary indicators) have not improved since 2008!

- Changing personal behaviour is fine, but we need systemic change, too.