

‘Nurture in His Name’
Practical environmental actions churches are taking – and could take

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The presentation begins with a short film featuring: E.O.Wilson, the Head of the US Nature Conservancy, Chief Scientist of the World Bank, Head of WWF International, Lord May, Martin Palmer, Jonathon Porritt Rowan Williams and the President of the Ocean Alliance – all explaining how religion should be playing a major role in the world’s environmental issues.

So how are people of faith – in particular within the Church of England – heading to the call?

Following a debate on the environment in General Synod in 2005 the CofE launched its national *Shrinking the Footprint* campaign in 2006 to enable the whole Church to address – in faith, practice and mission – the issue of climate change. As a result of another debate in the General Synod earlier in 2014 the Church has appointed the Bishop of Salisbury to be Lead Bishop for the environment, with the bishops of Kingston and Dudley to support him. The new Lead Bishop will chair a newly formed Archbishops Council’s Environmental Working Group.

They will be considering action the CofE should be taking regarding its environmental footprint with its 16,200 churches, 5,000 schools, offices, clergy and See houses and palaces. The energy used is quite considerable and the biodiversity in its 10,000 churchyards – a major national asset.

If that wasn’t enough we are part of the Anglican Communion with an estimated membership of 78million in over 30 provinces, worshipping in very different environments, including some who could experience the greatest effects of climate change.

Here, each diocese should have an environmental policy and a Diocesan Environment Officer – several have an environment group or committee.

We also have contacts with clergy with environmental interests.

So all should be sorted – or is it?

Your next speaker, David Atkinson, provided the title of some green theology sessions we organised recently at the College of Bishops – ‘It may all be very worthy, but shouldn’t we be preaching the Gospel?’ – a comment said to him after a presentation he had once given on the church and the environment.

David’s book – *Renewing the Face of the Earth* – begins with a call for the Christian Church to wake up to the urgency of climate change: ‘The Church has a God given responsibility to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel in relation to the world God has created and to our place within it. And the Church has a particular opportunity to bear that witness, which I believe to be increasingly urgent.’

But another publication by another churchman begins by saying that it is published as a warning against the Church picking another bandwagon with broken wheels that will waste time, gifts and money just as the world is beginning to realise that the environment is not in such a dire state after all.

So, people of faith are not necessarily singing from the same hymn sheet.

Indeed next week on November 5 in the House of Commons, Christians in Parliament are holding a panel discussion, *Can we afford to Save the Planet?* On the panel will be the former Bishop of Liverpool and Lord Lawson, whose Global Warming Policy Foundation works here with climate sceptics and has a diocesan bishop as one of its trustees.

It has strong links with the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation in the States – an evangelical voice promoting environmental stewardship and economic development built on Biblical principles.

The day before the Climate Marches around the world last month it issued a new declaration – *Protect the Poor: Ten Reasons to Oppose Harmful Climate Change Policies*, with 140 signatures, including those of 21 climate scientists, 28 other scientists, 21 economists (including specialists in environmental economics), 48 theologians, philosophers, and pastors, 29 ministry leaders, and 10 media figures who believe that today's proposed climate change policies will hurt society's most vulnerable.

So does this suggest a great opportunity for Canon Theologians today to create a theology incorporating current environmental issues which all could agree with? There is, after all, a not so insignificant audience in waiting. There is no shortage of organisations and there have probably never been so many initiatives.

Out of the estimated 670,000 people who took to the streets in last month's climate marches around the world many were from faith organisations. In New York there were two faith events linked to the UN Summit for world leaders. Faith leaders signed a declaration and faith delegates joined the march carrying a minaret of an inflatable mosque and a wooden replica of Noah's Ark the size of a school bus. In London there was a special church service and an interfaith gathering before the march, and the Bishop of London addressed the marchers when they reached Parliament Square.

Climate Change knows no boundaries and so the faith organisations are very well placed to provide an international dimension to awareness of the subject.

Amongst the organisations involved include Christian Ecology Link, still going strong after over 30 years, A Rocha – which includes Eco Congregation – John Ray Initiative, Operation Noah plus organisations like Christian Aid and Tear Fund.

As part of the run-up to the Climate Summit in December 2015 there are three initiatives:

- **Prayer and Fast for the Climate** which is being launched this Saturday at a number of churches around the country to mobilise Christians of all denominations to fast and pray on the first day of every month for a meaningful and just climate agreement.
- **Hope for the Future** is a national campaign involving prayer and politics supported by Christian Aid, aimed at getting realistic climate change policies into the manifestos of the main political parties prior to the General Election. The campaign is encouraging members of congregations to send at least 10 letters to every MP.
- And the international multifaith **Our Voices**, whose goal is for millions of people of faith and moral belief to sign and pray in their own tradition for the Paris 2015 UN Climate Summit to succeed.

P2P pilgrimages are planned to head towards Paris at the time Climate Summit and plans are well advanced for pilgrimages to set out from Germany, France, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Africa, Finland, Italy and Hungary as well as the UK, where the starting point will be a Commissioning service in the Cathedral. The plan is for all to converge on Paris on Saturday 5 December in time for special services on the Sunday.

On Monday I was speaking at the launch of the Jewish Sustainable Movement, which is looking to rejuvenate the Jewish community through the connection to the sustainable roots in its tradition. The movement seeks to grow sustainable practices within the individuals and institutions of the Jewish community and is seeking to encourage Jews to work with other faiths on environmental issues.

There is also growing campaigning for churches to divest in shares in fossil fuels companies, led in this country by Operation Noah with their Bright Now campaign.

This weekend, the London Muslim Centre is helping of the 9% of London living in fuel poverty by organising free training on how to insulate homes with free easy to use insulating materials and energy-saving tips and advice from experts.

But these are of course campaigns aiming to get members of faith communities involved in external campaigns – what about in their own church life, and the day to day management of the buildings, land, schools and their administration? Where are the solar panels, the biodiverse churchyards, the shared car schemes, parish buying, clergy training, the common theology?

Shrinking the Footprint has a website full of useful information:

- It has encouraged churches to audit energy use through sMeasure;
- It has produced an App to record personal carbon use with a daily prayer guide;
- It has produced Church Guidance on air source heat pumps, biomass heating, solar power, the green deal, trees, wildlife and bats;
- It is a founder member of the Community Energy Coalition;
- It is supporting an Environmental Engagement Programme in the Lichfield diocese which it hopes will become a national initiative involving parish action and awareness;
- It has organised meetings on faculties, flooding and fracking;
- And it chairs the Historic Environment Adaptation Group.

Amongst other things!

Nationwide, our map, which includes all church buildings including schools, shows some 480 renewable energy installations. A survey of the Diocese of Bath and Wells showed that 30% of churches are regularly referring to the environment in their teaching and preaching. When asked to name the obstacles to taking on more environmental action many churches cited lack of time, money or people to take the lead.

In the Bath and Wells Diocese, two thirds of churches have taken the vital first step to reducing carbon emissions – monitoring and reducing energy use. However only 3% have taken the more advanced steps of installing a renewable energy installation.

Earlier this month the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment and the Diocese held a conference to explore how churches could be made warmer and more welcoming, but cost less to run.

St Paul's Cathedral is making major strides in its energy efficiency – not easy when there are over 30 electricity meters dotted around different parts of the building. St Albans diocese has introduced environmental grants to help projects like bee-keeping training in one of its parish churches. Meanwhile a parish in Upper Hale has got permission and raised funding to create a community orchard.

On a national level we will be supporting a Government scheme to help our dwindling pollinators by encouraging farmers on church land and those who look after churchyards to incorporate plantings and maintenance to help stop the decline in the pollinators' population.

But opposing views on environmental issues are rife in society generally – those who care and those who couldn't care less. Those who like windfarms and those who don't – never mind whether they are beautiful or monstrosities if they are on your land it's money in the bank, if not they are a waste of money because there's no wind on a cold winter's night. Tidal barriers, new roads, new airports, planes verses trains, recycling uses more energy – bottled water verses tap water. Not to mention badgers or fracking.

And in between all the very different views there are clergy sharing in the news that the scientists cannot agree.

Little wonder many clergy would avoid raising the issue as they know when it comes to the hand shaking at the end of the service they will hear the views from green to blue and all possible shades in between. Few clergy have the luxury of abandoning their cars in favour of a bicycle to carry out their daily duties, often involving more than one parish, whilst they live and work in buildings lacking the basic forms of energy saving, roof or cavity wall insulation, using obsolete boilers and even though they might wish to make their homes eco-friendly clergy housing does not qualify for help from the Government's Green Deal.

How many bought a diesel engine car thinking at least that would help the planet only to find out that this is not now the case?

I well remember sitting down after making a presentation on *Environmental Issues and the Church* and hearing a clergyman sitting behind me say to his neighbour, 'These greenies have to understand that they've got to get in the queue – I've got the homeless, the elderly and the hungry to deal with'.

I didn't, but I wanted to turn around and say to him, 'Yes, and if we get the environment wrong ALL those problems could get even worse!'

No wonder we want to distance ourselves and enjoy a quiet cup of coffee, despite being told that the average Briton now spends more on coffee each morning than the world's poorest people have to survive on for the whole day. Little wonder we don't work out the carbon tax we should be paying on the flowers flown in to decorate our churches.

But the Church provides great support – there were only 4 Marks of Mission:

- to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;
- to teach, baptize and nurture new believers;
- to respond to human need by loving service;
- and to seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation.

Later a fifth mark was added, with the Anglican Consultative Council saying, 'We now feel that our understanding of the ecological crisis, and indeed of the threats to the unity of all creation, mean that we have to add a fifth affirmation:

- to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

And people outside the Church expect it to be not just involved, but taking a lead...

In 2007 the UK's Environment Agency carried out research amongst a number of environmental and sustainable development experts, with the aim of identifying the 50 most important actions for overcoming the ecological crisis. At number 2 out of 50 – between 'saving energy' and 'solar power' – was the need for world's religions to 'make the planet their priority'.

Comments from participants included:

- 'The world's faith groups have been silent for too long on the environment... it is time they fulfilled their rightful collective role in reminding us that we have a duty to restore and maintain the ecological balance of the planet.'
- 'Faith groups need to form a coalition to set an example to the rest of the population.'

I'll close with this quote from the Dean of Forestry at Yale, who told a group of religious leaders:

'I used to think the top environmental problems facing the world were global warming, environmental degradation and eco-system collapse, and that we scientists could fix those problems with enough science. But I was wrong. The real problem is not those three items, but greed, selfishness and apathy. And for that we need a spiritual and cultural transformation – and we scientists don't know how to do that. We need your help.'