

Announcement for Local Churches on July 18th

Time to Change? an Alarm Call for the planet.

The Earth is wrapped in a cosy blanket, made of certain gases that persist in the atmosphere, such as carbon dioxide (but there are others). Like a blanket they keep the planet just warm enough – without this blanket it would be so cold life would be impossible. But as we know, pile on more and more blankets and the bed becomes unbearably warm. Add more and more “greenhouse gases”, as they are called, and the Earth becomes too hot, a change which affects all life on our planet. But this is a blanket that can’t be quickly removed, or bypassed by sticking a leg out of bed.

Instead, the Earth responds violently. Climate changes, things warm up, and creatures that cannot stand the heat try to move, perhaps toward the poles. Plants are equally affected, and crops fail – sometimes the land they once grew on has become desert. Like everything else the oceans warm up and their water expands so that sea level rises. Low lying land floods. As forests become warmer and drier they more easily catch fire, and fires started by people become more likely to spread. Ice caps and ice on high mountains melt and the water released flows to the seas and adds to rising sea levels.

We have seen all this happening: the News is full of it. So we ask, “What causes it?”, “Can it be stopped?”, “Is it too late? And we know the answers: the cause is us, millions of us, burning coal, oil, peat, waste products, driving cars and taking air flights. It could be reduced, just possibly even stopped, eventually. It would take hundreds of years to reverse the damage already done, and it would require international cooperation on an unprecedented scale. But it could be done.

This is what the international conference in Glasgow in November, called COP26, is all about, and for the sake of the planet and its creatures and people it needs to make significant progress. The United Kingdom government will chair this conference – the conference and chairing it rotates among the countries attending it; this year it is the UK’s turn.

Churches, which recognise the planet and its creatures is not just our home but is God’s creation and care, have designated a special Sunday as Climate Sunday, to support and encourage government and nation in this year of decision about climate change. This will be on September 5th. In the Peterborough Circuit, today, July 18th has been designated as Climate Awareness Sunday, when we ask ourselves what our churches will do to provide that support and encouragement.

We are asked to:

- Reflect in climate-focused worship and prayer, exploring the theological and scientific basis of creation care and action on climate
- Make a commitment as a local church community to taking specified long term action to reduce our own greenhouse gas emissions.
- Join with other churches and wider society by adding our church’s name to a call for the UK government to take much bolder action on climate change in *this* country in advance of COP26, and to strengthen its credibility to lead the international community to adopt a step change in action at COP26. There is website page enabling us to do this at <https://www.climatesunday.org/>.

The planning group set up to guide Local Preachers and Worship Leaders in Peterborough Circuit has produced a short list of resources that church groups and members can use to better inform themselves about this crisis and how to respond within the fellowship of the church.

Resources available to churches and members:

There is plenty of material available, mostly on-line. Too much in fact! – the difficulty is deciding where to look and which resources to use. We recommend the following:

- (a) As a useful introduction, Tear Fund have released a series of short videos, relating climate change issues to Biblical and Theological perspectives – see <https://www.tearfund.org/campaigns/christianity-and-climate-change-film-series>.
- (b) <https://www.climateemergencytoolkit.com/> is a good guide to setting up an action plan for a local church. A valuable feature is the number of links to other resources which make it valuable for a church or organisation that is starting the journey of climate change action.
- (c) A Rocha have the EcoChurch scheme to guide and, later, certify churches in reviewing all aspects of their life in relation to climate change impacts. EcoChurch is recommended by the Methodist Church nationally, and our District (Northampton) is recognised as an Eco-district. See: <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>.
A Rocha claim: “Our free online survey and supporting resources are designed to equip your church to express your care for God’s world in your worship and teaching; in how you look after your buildings and land; in how you engage with your local community and in global campaigns, and in the personal lifestyles of your congregation.
The actions you take will count towards a prestigious Eco Church Award at Bronze, Silver or Gold level. Complete our Eco Survey to gauge where your church currently is in relation to the three different levels; you may find you already qualify for an Eco Church Award!”
- (d) If individuals or small groups want background reading about climate change in relation to the wider environmental crisis affecting the world as a result of human activities, and firmly linked to theological and Biblical study a useful book (and a fairly gentle read) has been published by the Bible Reading Fellowship. “A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues”, second edition. Written by Martin and Margot Hodson and published by the Bible Reading Fellowship it addresses Climate Change in the context of the wider environmental emergency, from biblical and theological as well as scientific perspectives. Note: things move quickly, and the first edition of this book is now out of date. The second edition was published in April 2021 and contains much new material about climate change.

CONTACT CIRCUIT ABOUT YOUR PLANS:

Please keep Circuit advised as your plans for climate change action develop, through the circuit office or the Superintendent, Langley. The Planning Group for preachers and worship leaders may be able to offer advice (though this is all nearly as new to us as to you!), and we will keep track of what you are doing to allow ideas and plans to be shared around the circuit.

It would be helpful to make preachers and worship leaders aware of what you are doing towards climate awareness and action, when they are planned for services in your church. Please also keep in mind the first target date for climate activity in the circuit – September 5th 2021 – when services will be reflect what we are doing to encourage government and nation as they make plans and negotiate internationally at COP26 and otherwise. However, that will not be the climax of our efforts: prayer, practical action and activism will continue to be needed of the church as well as wider society onward to and beyond the end of this year.

May God the Creator guide us and strengthen us in our worship and church life as we work towards Climate Sunday and beyond. He has given us a wonderful world; let’s not forget to enjoy it and celebrate it, while we acknowledge human responsibility for this environmental crisis, seek forgiveness and join our God in his work of supporting that world.

A PRAYER

We suggest using the following prayer, or some other, to reflect your church's commitment to "Climate Sunday" objectives.

A prayer of Pope Francis, taken from the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'*:

All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.

Amen