

CALLED TO CARE FOR CREATION – DIOCESAN POLICY AND ACTION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

At the June 2019 Diocesan Synod meeting members received a note on progress on the Sevenoaks Deanery Synod's 2017 motion to adopt a strategy or policy to address climate change, sustainability and other environmental issues. Following the helpful presentation and feedback at that Synod meeting, further research, networking and conversations have been undertaken to ascertain the best way forward for the Diocese.

The overall aim remains:

- to lead the Diocese in caring for creation and in demonstrating good environmental practice;
- to join with the wider Anglican community, particularly our Companion Dioceses, other denominations and faiths in supporting pro-environmental initiatives, including the Church of England Environment Programme;
- to encourage churches, schools and others within the Diocese to take action in caring for creation; and
- to provide information and resources to support action for the environment by all, and to encourage the sharing of good practice.

And that our approach should speak to the following areas:

- Individuals as they live as Christians in their daily lives
- Local churches and schools, being at the heart of their community
- The Diocesan Synod, boards and committees and departments

This paper sets out the broad situation in the diocese, regionally, nationally and internationally, and sets short-, medium- and long-term goals.

Where we are

Analysis of the responses to the environmental survey sent to parishes in early 2019 reveals an appetite for the Diocese to support and encourage local parishes to take action, and interest in how the environmental impact of the diocese's property portfolio could be reduced.

Although we lack a formal policy, there are already many activities being undertaken by parishes and Diocesan staff to try and reduce our impact on the environment. This includes a number of parishes who have achieved or are working towards the Eco Church award, activities in schools, and environmental improvements to parsonages. Rochester Cathedral is developing plans actively to engage with these issues. Recent social media posts linked to Creationtide have highlighted some of the great work going on. (Example: <https://www.rochester.anglican.org/communications/news/aylesford-makes-less-plastic-pledge.php>).

Our neighbouring Diocese of Canterbury has a well-established Environment Working Group (EWG), action plan and policy in place. They are keen to work together with us on relevant activities. Their Environment Working Group has a representative from each Deanery, and some Deaneries have a similar meeting with representatives from parishes. Their activities focus on encouraging parishes to achieve the Eco Church award (<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>) and are working towards the Eco Diocese award.

The National Church has a network of Diocesan Environment Officers (DEOs) who meet in regional groups to share information and learning and meet annually for a conference event. The Called Together Manager has agreed to be the 'contact person' for our Diocese until a suitable DEO is identified (see Actions below).

A number of Anglican dioceses, along with local authorities and other organisations, are declaring a Climate Emergency. A motion is expected to go before General Synod when it next meets. The Salisbury Diocese are researching carbon neutrality.

Internationally the leaders of churches in the Anglican Communion see the climate crisis as one of the top three issues they currently face.

Next year, 2020, three significant opportunities are expected:

1. Archbishops Lent Book 2020 – Saying Yes to Life. The book has been written by Dr Ruth Valerio. Ruth was previously Churches and Theology Director at A Rocha and now Director of Global Advocacy and Influencing for TearFund. Each chapter goes through one of the days of creation, and brings together environmental, ethical and social concerns.

The publisher's blurb says:

"'Saying Yes to Life' lifts our focus from every day (and perfectly natural) concerns to issues that are impacting millions of lives around the world. As people made in the image of God, we are entrusted to look after what God has made - to share in the joy and creativity of God in making a difference for good. Ruth Valerio imaginatively draws on the Days of Creation (Genesis 1 - 2.2) in relating themes of light, water, land, the seasons, other creatures, humankind, Sabbath rest and resurrection hope to matters of environmental, ethical and social concern. Foundation to the book are what it means to be human and, in particular, to be a follower of Jesus during Lent. Voices from other continents are heard throughout, and each chapter ends with discussion questions, a prayer, and specially commissioned art to aid action and contemplation."

The book will be published on 21 November 2019 and will cost £9.00. There will be national communications materials to support it around Lent, including short films and social media posts.

2. The Lambeth Conference – the climate crisis and the environment will be a major discussion theme
3. In September the [COP26 UN Climate Change meeting](#) will take place in Glasgow, with opportunities for campaigning, awareness raising, and pilgrimage

The national network of DEOs is looking at how parishes and individuals can engage with each of these.

What next – our goals

Short Term Actions:

- Environment Working Group to be established, inviting membership from across the Diocese (using the Canterbury model). The Environmental Working Group will be invited to report to the Bishops Leadership Team through the Called Together Resourcing Mission and Ministry workstreams
- Continue to listen to the concerns and questions of parishes, to understand the opportunities to support positive change
- Continue to work with Rochester Cathedral to explore these issues together
- Engage with the Diocesan Board of Education to understand and support work in schools
- Identify member of Bishops Leadership Team to lead and advocate on these issues
- Representative to attend Canterbury's EWG and feedback
- Representative to attend regional DEOs meeting and feedback
- Register for Eco Diocese award
- Engage with our Partner Dioceses specifically on environmental issues

Medium Term Actions:

- EWG to develop a detailed action plan by March 2020, including mapping activities already undertaken
- Draw up role description and identify suitable person to be Diocesan Environmental Officer (can be voluntary role), to link with national and regional activities, and feedback and encourage local actions
- Encourage and support churches to work towards the Eco Church awards, as part of working towards Eco Diocese award

Long Term Actions:

- EWG to research and develop an environmental policy to be adopted by Diocesan Synod
- Work collaboratively with others to deliver sustainable and impactful change

Next Steps

Diocesan Synod is invited to APPROVE the approach outlined in this paper and encourage interested individuals to join the Environment Working Group

Called Together Manager

September 2019