



Creation Care and the Environment – The Fifth Mark of Mission

2 March 2019

The global and national picture

The environment is God's gift to everyone and we have a responsibility to care for it. We cannot think of ourselves as isolated from others or from creation. Our impact on the planet is reducing [biodiversity](#), changing the climate, and polluting the earth. Around the world, climate change is affecting food security, creating social vulnerability, and disrupting peace and security.

As Anglicans, we have been called to follow the five marks of mission. All are deeply relevant to creation care although the fifth mark of mission specifically calls on us to 'safeguard the integrity of creation and renew the life of the earth'.

In response to these challenges and this call, the Church of England launched its national environmental campaign 'Shrinking the Footprint' in 2006 following a debate in General Synod in 2005 titled *Sharing God's Planet*.

In 2014, there was a further debate in General Synod which called on the Church of England 'to raise the profile of climate change within the church and to seek to align the mission of the church with its investment arm and the life of the church'.

The 2014 debate led to the formation of a national level Environment Working Group chaired by the Bishop of Salisbury, who is the lead bishop on the environment.

The Environment Working Group has identified five key goals, namely to:

- Emphasise Creationtide as integral to the Church of England's liturgical practice;
- Engage with congregations and those responsible for buildings regarding environmental and biodiversity issues;
- Support clergy and Diocesan Environment Officers in their engagement with environmental issues, especially through ministry training and dioceses;
- Develop ecumenical and interfaith links [as it pertains to this work]; and
- Improve communications on Church of England environment issues with and beyond National Church Institutions.

Creation care was again on the agenda of General Synod at its February 2019 group of sessions with a call for every diocese to have an environment programme with a member of the bishop's senior team leading and advocating for the programme.

At the local level, hundreds of churches are working towards the Eco Church awards and twenty dioceses have registered their intent to work towards Eco Diocese status.

Eco Church is an *A Rocha UK* initiative, run in partnership with Christian Aid, the Methodist Church, the Church of England, the United Reform Church and Tearfund. It guides churches to prioritise creation care by working in areas such as worship and teaching, management of church buildings and land, lifestyle, and community and global engagement (<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>).

An Eco Diocese is a diocese where a certain percentage of its churches have achieved Eco Church awards (gold, silver, bronze) and where that diocese has achieved a number of other goals (see <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/eco-diocese/>).

Four dioceses have so far been awarded Eco Diocese status (Birmingham, Guildford, Salisbury and Winchester).

The Diocese of Bristol – developments so far

In 2016, the Diocese of Bristol appointed its first Diocesan Environment Officer (DEO) since ISR closed in 2014, in line with the Environment Working Group's desire to ensure that all dioceses have DEOs. In the same year, we convened a small Diocesan Environment Group chaired by our DEO, Martin Gainsborough, to start scoping our work in this area. As part of this, we held an environment day aimed at local churches in April 2018 and a plastic free 'big green picnic' on College Green in August. We have also connected with other dioceses and denominations, researched what a good diocesan environment policy looks like, and learnt about Eco Diocese/Eco Church.

The Diocese of Bristol – our ambitions

We are now at the point where we need to step up our work in this area and look at how we are going to resource it. We have some catching up to do – witness the fact that some dioceses have already achieved Eco Diocese status. However, we are also conscious that if we are to commit to this work we need to resource it properly. That said, there are huge opportunities for the Diocese if we were to embrace this work, not least in respect of our mission and evangelism.

Canon Martin Gainsborough
Chaplain to the Bishop of Bristol
Diocesan Environment Officer, on behalf of the Diocese Environment Group
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