

Pathways

The magazine for the people of the Diocese of Oxford | Summer 2020 | **FREE**

Time to act

on the climate emergency



PLUS: Connect with creation | Hope over anxiety | Out of the woods...

Hello



Lockdown has been difficult, but it has also brought new insights, opportunities and priorities to the surface. Part of being a contemplative church will be to reflect carefully on lessons learned and next steps – you'll find resources on the website to help with planning and reflection as we begin to emerge from coronavirus.

While an immediate concern for us all, COVID-19 is not the only challenge facing our world. The 2020s will prove critical in setting the agenda for human flourishing over the next fifty or a hundred years. We have to tackle issues of equality and diversity, living well with technology and caring for the environment. The world stands at a crossroads on all of these.

This edition of *Pathways* focusses on the climate emergency. The choice of image for the front cover is apposite. We're at a crucial moment: desertification in the world is a sign of our growing inner spiritual deserts; we need to make the link between our inner and outer selves.

On page 18, Hannah Malcolm talks about the phenomenon of climate anxiety and challenges us to choose hope instead. In place of our usual head to head section, the former Director of Christian Aid and local climate activist, Michael Taylor, shares his thoughts on responding well to those who disagree.

Maranda St John Nicolle (p.10) and Margot Hudson (p.21) invite us to consider the climate from a biblical perspective, drawing on verses from Romans 8 and John 1. 'Go Green' on page 17 wraps up news of the Diocesan Environment Task Force with ten steps everyone can take to help renew our world.

The science is clear, the climate speaks for itself to anyone even half-listening. I hope that this issue of *Pathways* will inspire you to reflect and take action.

Bishop Steven

Church at Home

Not everyone is able to go in to their local church and not all of our churches are open. Join us for Church at Home, online each Sunday at 10am.

oxford.anglican.org/livestream

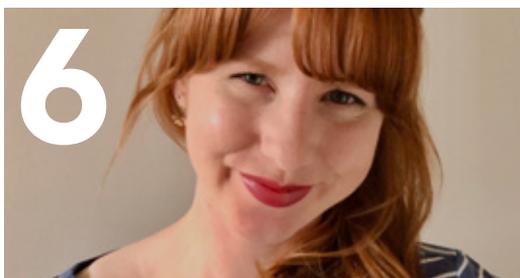
C19 Resources

Emerging from Coronavirus
oxford.anglican.org/emerging-from-coronavirus

Reflections for a Church in Lockdown
blogs.oxford.anglican.org/podcast

Guidance documents
oxford.anglican.org/coronavirus-covid-19

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Due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 crisis, for the first time, we have produced an online-only, PDF version of our magazine. Read online if you can and only print if necessary.

Sight impaired people can get a free audio version of Pathways. Call 01865 208227.



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School donates PPE

Aylesbury Vale Academy has donated PPE to Thames Valley Air Ambulance, a GP surgery and Oxford's John Radcliffe Hospital. So far 700 goggles, 300 face masks and 400 pairs of gloves have been donated.



#Together

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 ("Two are better than one") inspires the #Together vision at St Michael's School, Stewkley. Staff and pupils didn't realise just how relevant #Together would become when it was created. Since lockdown it's been displayed in pupils' homes.



Phone worship

In Denham, Buckinghamshire and Cumnor, near Oxford, dedicated telephone numbers allow people to dial in and listen to recorded morning worship. The Diocese's own Church at Home Sunday service also has a dedicated phone line.



Community in Winslow

"People who don't normally come to church are keen to work with us," says the Revd Andrew Lightbown, Rector. "We are now helping feed over 30 families on a weekly basis."



Sunflowers in Reading

St Eligius Church, Arborfield Green, has distributed 12,000 sunflower seeds to over 1,000 houses. With instructions on how to grow them on the parish website, it's hoped the flowers will brighten up the area this summer.



Hallelujah Chorus

A virtual *Hallelujah Chorus* from Handel's *Messiah* was produced by St Nicolas' Church, Taplow, to be used in a virtual Easter Sunday service.

Churchwarden Tony Bridge has provided notes on how he achieved it: bit.ly/howtodoachoir

Community Matters Foodbank

At Holy Trinity, Lane End, the foodbank supports 15 families. Following government guidance, it provides food and household items. Donated food is collected from a local Tesco store, and handed out by volunteers.



Light relief in Tilehurst

Something Silly and *Tots' Praise* videos proved the most popular as church went online at St Catherine's. The videos feature clergy playing games as well as regular worship services.



Cowley prayer/ reflection tree

The Cornerhouse pub and the nearby St Francis' Church are keeping the Cowley community spirit alive with a beer garden prayer tree. Reflections, prayers and prayer requests on the tree are included in the church's prayers.



Rainbow clusters

Rainbow clusters are strengthening relationships in Summertown. Mainly named after the colours of the rainbow, each cluster has around 12 members. They connect digitally and non-digitally for worship, prayer and practical support, like delivering shopping.



Routine is essential...

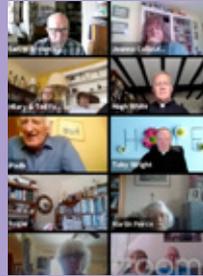
...for young children. So Lesley Dentry, from St Andrew's Church, is providing activities via Zoom. "There are thousands of activities on the internet, but I realised the missing link was seeing familiar faces," said Lesley.

Normal activities suspended

Every weekday in Littlemore there's online prayer and a community breakfast. People get in touch if they're aware of anyone lonely or in need. Those offering/needing support can also join the Oxford Hub.

Five-minute prayers

Want to pep up your prayer life but short on time? Check out these prayers recorded by the team at St John the Baptist, Kingston Bagpuize. There's a video and audio-only version of each prayer: bit.ly/fiveminprayers



Zoom in Witney

The Witney Benefice team are using a combination of Teams and Zoom for their work. They have organised chapter meetings using Zoom, a weekly party for parishioners, and online Sunday worship.

Leading the way

In Chipping Norton, St Mary's was crisis planning before lockdown. It's providing meals for those in need, shopping, craft bags for families and resilience packs for children moving to secondary school.



There's hope

COVID-19 isn't stopping great things happening in our churches. Get inspired by Angela Harper's story of her work with families in Sandhurst. Angela's role has expanded thanks to a grant from the Diocesan Development Fund.

oxford.anglican.org/expanding-the-work-with-families-in-sandhurst/

These are edited versions of a host of stories about how churches are responding to the pandemic. Read more at oxford.anglican.org/advice-and-inspiration-in-uncertain-times



Lydia Messling

Lydia Messling's love of creation inspires her faith, her studies and her jobs as she works to make a difference to the environment.

Lydia, who grew up in Kettering, Northamptonshire, never thought her life would include handing in a PhD thesis – something she did recently.

Now, living in Reading with husband David, Lydia is on the PCC at St Laurence's, a member of the Reading Deanery Synod and Oxford Diocesan Synod. She recently presented a motion calling for us to take ambitious action in caring for creation and on climate change.

Loving going to church as she was growing up, Lydia says: "We had a great youth group. I've always considered myself a Christian, but my faith has gone through periods of questioning and learning to sit with uncertainty," she says.

"The way that I know God is through creation. I find creation moves me. I've always wanted to know more about it."

Lydia studied Environmental Science at the University of East Anglia in Norwich. A year in San Francisco was when she faced one of the biggest challenges to her faith. "I remember thinking how can I be a scientist and a Christian? Yet my faith and love of creation was the reason I was so interested in science.

"And Isaiah 40 hit me: 'Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.' God is the great scientist. There are so many things science can't explain, but God can."

Returning from San Francisco, Lydia spent another year in Norwich while David did a law conversion course. She worked for a social enterprise, encouraging people to lift share and commute more sustainably.

Quitting their jobs, David and Lydia moved to Reading when David spotted scholarship funding for a PhD that would suit Lydia. "It was a real step of faith," she says. "Finding St Laurence's made it easier. Wherever I have gone in the world, I have always found a family – God's arm is not too short. His faithfulness in providing us with community and support has always been encouraging."

Lydia is a climate change communications consultant, training scientists how to talk to non-academic audiences, whether they are churches, policy makers or a local school.

She also works with national governments and large financial institutions to help them understand climate change risks and how they may affect them and their future planning.

"It's hard work, and it can be hard to stay hopeful," says Lydia. "The hope that we have as Christians is different from the hope the world has to offer. We have a unique voice that the world and climate change needs." ¶

Words: Jo Duckles Photo: Lydia Messling

This edition of *Pathways* focuses mainly on caring for the environment. It aims to be an inspirational source of information for everyone.



"And God saw that it was good." The refrain that runs through the opening chapter of Genesis reminds us of God's delight in creation and invites us to join in.

How to connect with creation

In the past few months, many of us have found comfort and joy in our connections with the natural world. We marvel at nature – whether we’re sitting inside looking out at its beauty, or once again can go for a walk, a run or a wild swim.

Connecting with nature improves mental health and wellbeing. Think of the sense of relaxation and pleasure from a walk in the countryside, compared with the stress of a crowded bus, train or a long motorway drive.

It has spiritual benefits too. Many of us find that nature speaks to us of God’s great power and goodness – it praises our Creator through its very being. And many of us find that we can more easily understand ourselves and draw close to God when we allow ourselves to be open to the natural world around us.

The theologian Richard Bauckham once wrote: “There is so much to notice about trees. All the endlessly complex patterns of their branches, all those different shapes, but they all (or most of them) have that upward direction, they reach up to the skies as though they were lifting their branches up to God in heaven, praising God by the whole direction in which they grow. They teach us what our lives, like theirs, are really for: to live and to grow in the direction of God’s glory.”

Meditating on nature

Reconnecting with nature can be as simple as meditating on what is outside your window. You could meditate in a quiet spot in the woods or the

park. Use as many of your senses as possible. Let your eyes follow a cloud in its motion across the sky.

Take a few minutes to listen for birdsong. If you can, touch the delicate tracery of a leaf or feel the weight of earth in your hands. Breathe in the scent of a piece of fruit you’re about to eat and taste its sweetness. What does each of these things say to you about God? You may feel inspired to sing God’s praise or to reflect on God’s nature or his work in your life. Follow where your thoughts are leading.

The fruit of our connections

When we truly stop to appreciate something, we grow in love for it. And when we grow in love for something that God loves – as God loves the world – we draw closer to God’s own self. We also grow in understanding of how precious these gifts are, and how important it is to care for them... as God first created humans to do. ¶



In our *Abundant Life* study guide, Bishop Steven touches on the issues described in this article. Order copies at oxford.anglican.org/study-guides

For alternative worship ideas, including worshipping outdoors, check out: bit.ly/EngageWorship

Words: Maranda St John Nicolle Photo: Steven Buckley

The Earth's redemption

“Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” *Romans 8: 38–39.*

Romans 8 has brought comfort to many in times of trouble, reminding us of the power of God’s saving love for us.

But the letter isn’t just about God’s plan for saving humanity. Paul mentions ‘all creation’. And in an earlier part of the chapter, he says that it, too, is part of God’s plan for redemption.

“The whole creation has been groaning in the pains of childbirth until now” Paul notes, as it “waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.”

For Paul, the suffering of creation is part and parcel of the Fall: human sin has distorted not only our lives, but also the life of the world around us.

In today’s world, it’s not hard to see a linkage between human action and creation’s pain – we have only to look at the rising heat that intensifies droughts and storms, the many creatures on the brink of extinction, the rivers that flow polluted, the mountains and hills stripped of their resources. Our careless treatment of God’s gifts strains the natural world beyond its capacity and leads to natural – and human – distress.

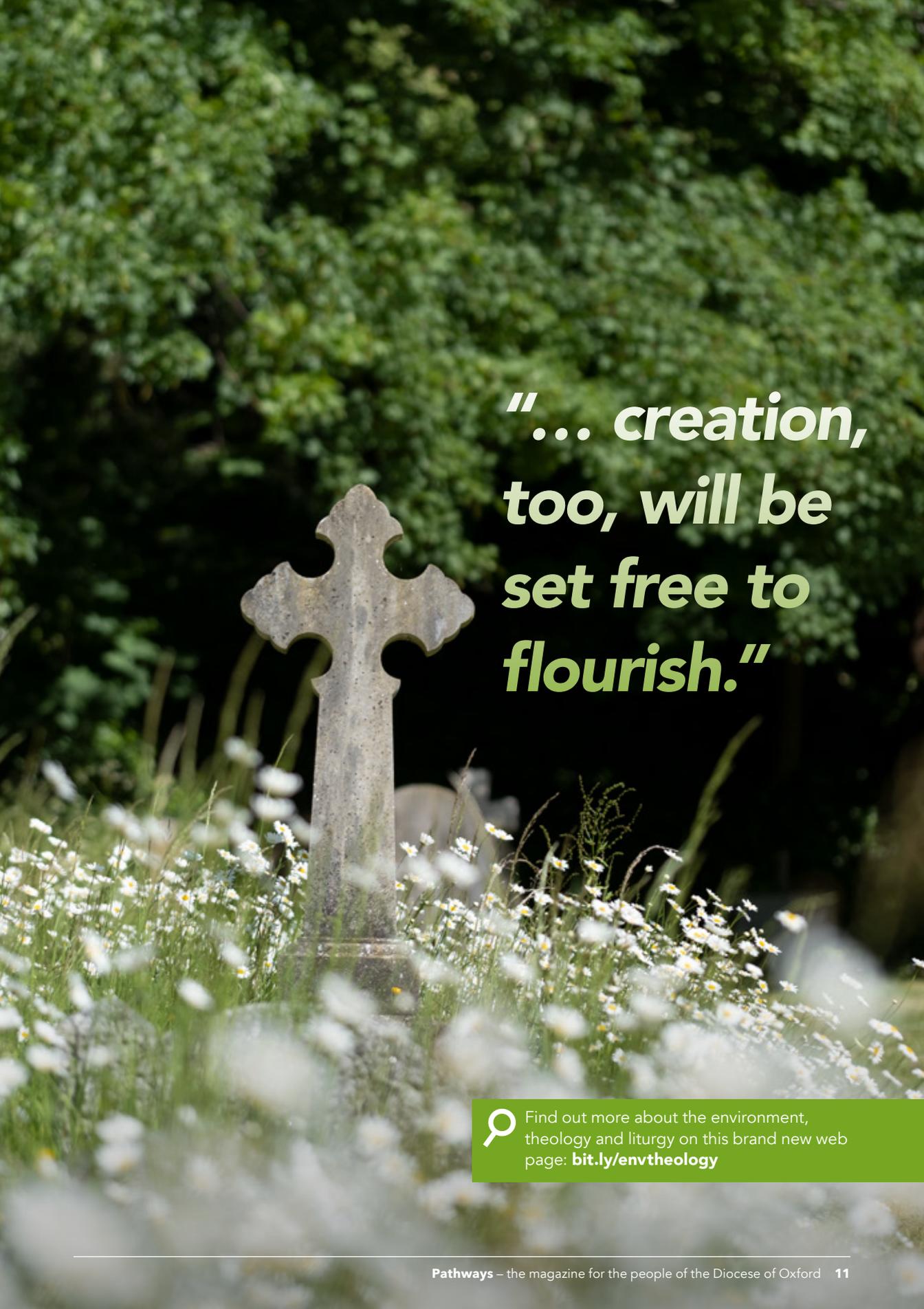
But what has been distorted by the Fall can also be redeemed by God. After Paul talks about creation “waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God,” he also says that “creation itself

will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” In other words, as humanity is transformed by the power of God’s redemptive work, creation, too, will be set free to flourish.

This isn’t the only place where the apostle links God’s redemption of humanity and of the wider creation of which we are a part. Colossians 1 speaks of Christ’s role in the formation of all that is, and then of his role in its restoration. “God was pleased,” the epistle reminds us, “through [Christ] to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

What might this mean for us in our daily lives? As Christians, prayer that God’s love will shape our human relationships is in our DNA. But if Christ’s reconciliation encompasses all creation, then allowing God’s love to reshape our relations with the rest of the natural world is also a core part of our life of faith. That’s a large task! But as Operation Noah’s *Climate Change and the Purposes of God* notes, citing Romans, we can ‘Act with hope’. Confident in God’s redemption plan, we can face issues that might otherwise seem overwhelming. And slowly, by God’s grace, we can be confident we will see signs of redemption – in ourselves, others and ‘our common home’.

Words: Maranda St John Nicolle Photo: Steven Buckley

A stone cross stands in a field of white daisies. The background is filled with lush green foliage, creating a soft, natural setting. The cross is weathered and has a decorative, four-lobed top.

***"... creation,
too, will be
set free to
flourish."***



Find out more about the environment,
theology and liturgy on this brand new web
page: bit.ly/envtheology

Agreeing to differ?



Michael Taylor is a former Director of Christian Aid and a climate activist in Summertown, Oxford.

You suddenly realise that a friend, a colleague, someone at church or in the family has a very different take on things. They're not convinced that climate change is happening, or is anything more than a natural cycle of events that will right itself as it has done in the past. And if they are convinced, they think it's all too late, or there's not much anyone can do about it, including them.

“Often, it’s not what you say, but how you say it.”

I've been caught out once or twice and have not handled things all that well. I've tried to work out one or two rules of thumb. Often it's not what you say but how you say it.

How not to say it

The moral high ground, for example, is not the best place to start. When it comes to caring for the planet, none of us has clean hands. The Church, imagining they were backed by Genesis 1, exploited the earth like other people until science and experience told us to stop!

Mr Know-All, who I eventually realised I sounded like, is best asked to leave the scene. Take comfort from the fact that no one is entirely sure what to say. On a personal level, most of us are not experts; and the experts are well aware that they've still a lot to find out. "I'm right and you're wrong" may be true, but it's best not to give that impression.

A frank discussion might be better. For example, if you are tempted to give up, why not change the direction of the conversation? There are all sorts of interesting, technical-type subjects that can steer you away from conflict. Many look promising and also raise questions. Can we successfully replace fossil fuels? Do solar panels produce more energy than is used to make them? Where does the electricity for electric cars come from? Is the final solution, if there is one, not in technology but in changing our way of life to make it more sustainable? Can we turn the vision of a low carbon economy into a reality? Talking things over without forcing the issue may be the best way forward.

With conflicting politics and opinion on climate change, half an hour on the internet can leave anyone puzzled. You might be sure of the reasons why we should care for creation, but what if a conversation suddenly takes a difficult turn?

Take an interest in others

I tell myself that it's often better to take a genuine interest in someone else's view rather than impose my own. The denials may not be all they seem. In America, there's a link between climate change deniers, more right-wing thinkers and Christian conservatives. These denials are probably rooted less in their faith than in a distrust of what they regard as left-wing politics.

Nearer home there may be business interests, feelings of helplessness, a non-scientific background, fear, personal or family issues, all of which can foster denial and get tangled up with the problem. We learn from listening. We won't get much further if we don't.

Confessional mode

After all of that, I'm going to stick to what I call *the confessional mode*. As I've already confessed, in one

sense my general approach to the conversation is admitting I'm not without sin. Far from claiming to know everything I will stick to "confessing" in another sense or simply sharing what I think and

what I'm up to. I won't suggest that anyone else should do likewise. And I shall confess selectively and where it fits into the conversation, rather than getting it all off my chest at once.

What do I think?

The evidence for climate change is everywhere I look. The weather is different and scary at times. The ice is melting, green land is turning brown and livelihoods are threatened. Seas are rising. Floods and drought are driving people from home. The gaps between the well off and the desperate are getting wider.

Political leaders are generally doing too little, too late. The emissions at

"The evidence for climate change is everywhere I look."

Michael's article continues overleaf

the root of the problem are declining, but not fast enough. It's not me but my grandchildren who will take the brunt of it all. There are lots of promising initiatives from technology to lifestyle. We can get there if we really try. As a Christian I have a duty of care for the planet that I love. All of us are far from perfect, but in all of us are sparks of love, generosity and creativity.

Jesus' love for justice makes me think that playing fair might get us on the right road. After all, it is the poor that are suffering the most and have the least chance of defending themselves. As a Christian, I've been taught to hope since it seems that no situation, however gloomy, is entirely closed and devoid of promise.

What am I doing?

What am I doing? Not enough, of course, and not always for the best. I'm still flying, though much less than I did. I'm driving a car less than I did. I walk whenever and wherever I can, more than I did. I'm still eating meat, though less than I did. I'm heating the house with gas, though less than I did. I'm thinking about switching. I've got a bit of money which I'm trying to invest in sustainable enterprises which play fair.

I go out and find eco-companions because I know I can't do it alone. I help with the gardening at church in the hope that its eco-friendliness may inspire someone else. I support one or two charities: conserving the environment, reducing carbon emissions, standing by refugees and poorer communities here and overseas. I hesitate to say too much about Extinction Rebellion in case it upsets you. Still, somehow I have to try with others to mobilise public opinion and force governments to act.

I go to church despite its record, say my prayers, say thank you for a wonderful world, hope to hear the Gospel, get reminded that I am forgiven and that justice is required of me, realise that I'm not alone, and learn to hope again that we've got enough love to see us through.

Should you be somewhat taken aback by all of that, well, it's come from the 'me' I wish I was and struggle to be. If you're disappointed that I don't do more or have more helpful things to say, well, I'm human like the rest. One way or another I hope it helps you get your act together, gain a bit of quiet confidence and find a few more things to pop into that tricky conversation – not all at once of course. ¶

Further resources

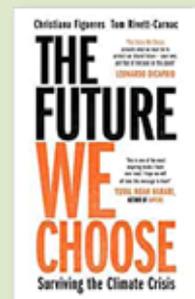
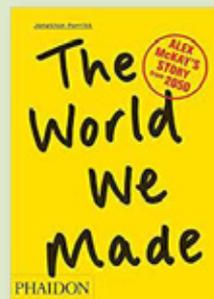
Planet of the Humans (2019), directed by Jeff Gibbs, with Michael Moore as executive producer, is a pro-climate activist movie that critics say plays into the hands of the climate-denying American right.

Moore says that *Planet of the Humans* is a documentary "that dares to say what no one else will this Earth Day – that we are losing the battle to stop climate change on planet Earth because we are following leaders who have taken us down the wrong road..."

The many critics include George Monbiot who, writing for *The Guardian*, says the film: "...stumbles so blindly into toxic issues that Moore, former champion of the underdog, unwittingly aligns himself with white supremacists and the extreme right."

bit.ly/MonbiotGuardian

Despite the uproar over this film, there are many more resources. Two favourite books our team are reading are *The Future We Choose* by Christina Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnack and *The World We Made*, by Jonathon Porritt.



More perspectives here: bit.ly/envtheology

Climate emergency

Schools, churches, parishioners and families will have to work together if we are to achieve net zero.

With £400,000 already invested in a carbon footprint reduction programme, creation care was already a top priority for the Diocese at the start of the year. But we needed to do much more. So, when a motion to declare a climate emergency came to Diocesan Synod in March, there was overwhelming support.

We've set an ambitious goal of achieving net zero on carbon emissions by 2035. It's tough, but if schools, churches, parishioners and families all work together, it's achievable. In fact, we hope to do even better – to reach net zero by 2030 if we possibly can. It's a giant leap forward, and an Environment Task Group, led by Bishop Olivia, is working to help churches plan action, prayer and advocacy at every level.

“It is our calling and our responsibility”

Averting the climate emergency

“It will be costly, but we must play our part in this,” says Bishop Olivia. “It is our calling and our responsibility. We face the facts and reality with gritty determination and stubborn optimism. We can do this if we choose to.”

Already, more than 10 per cent of our churches have completed energy audits, giving them the chance to become more energy efficient while saving money. Changing to a green energy supplier, like Parish Buying's renewable tariff, is one way to do this. Installing a more efficient heating system if you need to replace your current one is another.

These are simple, effective things that every church should already be planning for. Overleaf you'll find further steps you and your church can take to play a part in our effort to avert the climate crisis.

An electric vehicle charging point, and a switch to a renewable energy tariff, have been just two climate-friendly actions at Church House Oxford.

An energy audit in December 2018 resulted in immediate improvements to energy consumption. All of the Church House teams are reviewing their activities, and coming up with ideas for how we can be greener in our day-to-day work.

We are developing a network of experts and champions with a passion for specific areas in the programme.

These areas include:

- Environment focused liturgy
- Teaching and learning
- Church and community outreach
- Advocacy and campaigning
- Technical carbon zero know-how and advice

Any individual or group will be able to join our environmental champions network.

An online EcoHub will be a one-stop-shop for information, with a wealth of Christian reflection, pastoral, liturgical and practical resources and connections.

This will include a 'helpdesk' function that'll be a font of eco-knowledge. Individuals and groups will be able to ask questions about small changes and major projects. These could be anything from changing to more eco-friendly cups and plates to projects involving major building work.

The EcoHub will advise you on how to save water, recycle food waste, be more energy-efficient and choose environmentally friendly travel and food options. There'll be advice on community and church tree planting, litter-picking, eco-fairs, engaging with Eco Church and much more. Advice on campaigning on a national and international level, guidance on lobbying MPs, and supporting groups like A Rocha, Operation Noah, Climate Outreach and Hope for the Future will all be included.

There will also be opportunities for you to gather with others to think through what you can do, individually and with your church, to help with creation care. We'll be piloting a brand-new teaching and action initiative which will provide participants with high-quality information on climate science, theology and ways to inspire action. ¶



To find out more about how you and/or your church can help avert the climate crisis visit oxford.anglican.org/environment

Image composite: Shutterstock



7

Get inspired by reading how one urban parish became an eco Church.
[oxford.anglican.org/
an-urban-eco-church/](https://oxford.anglican.org/an-urban-eco-church/)

Go Green

Everyone can get involved with getting greener. Young or old, living where birds sing or traffic roars, we all have different capacities, interests and skills to offer to renew the world.

1

Offer sustainable refreshments – and serve them sustainably. Perhaps try Traidcraft or Kingdom Coffee products.

2

Choose re-usable cutlery and crockery – or you could ask people to bring their own cup, plate, spoon, knife and fork.

3

Embrace the bulk buying power of the Church as you switch to renewable energy: parishbuying.org.uk/energy-basket

4

Make the most of your land: make your churchyard wildlife friendly, plant trees, maybe even find space to 'grow your own' together.

5

Take the Eco Church survey – it lets you see what you're doing well and think about ideas for improvements: ecochurch.arocha.org.uk

6

Hold a film night – or read a book together – possibly using videochat. We've put a host of suggestions here: bit.ly/creationcareresources

8

Find out how to save energy. Your church can have a subsidised energy audit. Individuals can measure their own carbon footprint. oxford.anglican.org/energy-audits

9

Contact your MP – visit the Hope for the Future website for hints and tips on how and why you should get your local politicians involved: hfff.org.uk

10

Bring creation into church – consider possibilities for hymns, prayers, sermons and activities. The national church has collated some here: bit.ly/Churchclimatepolicy

Choose hope

In the 1940s, naturalist Aldo Leopold wrote that one of the penalties of an ecological education is living “alone in a world of wounds”.

In 1989, environmentalist Bill McKibben described his preference to walk in the woods in winter, “when it is harder to tell what might be dying.” In 2019 climate justice writer Mary Heglar identified “climate vision” as the unwanted ability to see climate projections all around you – sudden flashes of rising seas, dead people, deserted communities. As our collective anxieties rise, “climate grief” rhetoric is increasingly prominent in our public conversations about climate crisis. Opposite are a few of the headlines from the past year.

As a climate activist, writer and researcher, there is a tipping point for knowledge about a dying world, where my grief cannot be undone. I have reached that tipping point and cannot go back, no matter how much I try to guard myself against exposure to the relentless cycle of bad news. This is only heightened by the current pandemic – it feels like a foretaste of the global threats ahead. I live alongside my grief, even as I declare my faith in a God who resurrects and redeems the world. What does it mean to have hope in a renewed heaven and earth? How do we support each other, and especially younger people, whose futures are wrapped up in this threat?

“Anger and grief are appropriate responses to the climate crisis.”

We live in a time where “hopeful” news on climate and ecological breakdown is so rare as to be almost non-existent. We can’t rely on external sources to give us feelings of hopefulness as our motivator for acting, and if we do, we’re going to create despairing tendencies in each other.

Feeling hopeful has very little to do with being hopeful. Hope, much like love, is a choice.

But hopeful living does not replace or erase our grief. On the contrary: hopeful living needs grief and anger. Why? Because grief and anger express knowledge that things

can and should be different.

Anger and grief are appropriate responses to the climate crisis. They are part of being truthful. But they are also a tool for change. They remind us that this greed, destruction and death is a *choice* – is *sin*. It doesn’t have to be this way.

It is possible for us to live differently. In a climate anxious world, teach yourself and those you care for to grieve, to be angry, and to choose hope. ¶

Words: Hannah Malcolm

 Read about connecting with nature to improve mental health and wellbeing – pages 8 and 9.

Climate despair is making people give up on life

VICE.com, July 2019

Climate change: Iceland holds funeral for melted glacier

bbc.co.uk, August 2019

Derby staff and students given climate change anxiety therapy

bbc.co.uk, January 2020

How scientists are coping with ecological grief

The Guardian, January 2020

Need help?

Anxiety is a very real and suffocating condition. If you are experiencing panic attacks or worrying all the time, please talk to your GP or another medical professional. There are also plenty of resources that can help, including *Overcoming Anxiety* by Helen Kennerley. Mental health charity Mind also has advice, tools and resources to help: mind.org.uk

Apocalypse got you down? Maybe this will help

NY Times, November 2019

This passage from John 1 is known for linking the incarnation of Jesus to the creation narrative in Genesis 1. This is a powerful passage for Dwelling in the Word and reflecting on the environment.

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

These verses are from the New Revised Standard version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Dwelling in the Word

Traditionally used at Christmas, this account of Christ's coming has important implications long after the annual festivities have ended. It's helpful to reflect on these verses at a different time of year and to consider some wider themes.

The midnight Christmas service is a special moment for many Christians when we remember and welcome the coming of Christ into the world. There is something about going to church in the middle of the night that makes us aware of the enormity of Christ's coming.

If you find yourself walking home afterwards on a starlit night, it's a moment to look up into space and marvel that the one through whom this vast universe was made came into the world as a tiny and vulnerable child.

John opens his Gospel by drawing a parallel with Genesis 1 and the creation of the world. He sees Jesus in the very words of God, creating and sustaining our stunningly beautiful world and cosmos. Jesus did not come into our universe to rescue us from it, he chose to become a part of his amazing creation because he loves everything that he has made. As we consider our care for God's world, our starting point is that it is intrinsically good and loved by him.

Darkness comes in many forms. Some is 'natural' such as earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis, but many forms of darkness are caused or exacerbated by human action. Inadequate building regulations in earthquake zones, or the stripping of mangrove swamps exposing coastlines that had previously had some protection, turn natural events into human disasters. The climate emergency is a darkness of human origin, as we continue to burn

fossil fuels at an unsustainable rate. COVID-19 lays bare our abusive relationships with other animals: bat viruses don't just hop into humans, and the mistreatment of animals, the continuing agricultural industrialisation of once wild landscapes and other factors create the conditions where viruses can spread. Darkness is inherently discriminatory, and both climate change and the global pandemic impact disproportionately on the poorest and most vulnerable in the world.

We could despair at the darkness we see in our world, but in Christ we have hope: the light of Christ has come into the world and the darkness cannot overcome it. God has not remained distant from us in our struggles but has made his dwelling among us. God has not deserted us in our difficulties but is alongside us, supporting us, guiding us and calling us to be witnesses of his light. We see his glory and the humbling and challenging message of the Gospel; that we are called to follow him and bring light and life to a suffering world.

Let's dwell in these verses, asking God to help us fully recognise our Saviour as Creator of our world. Let us ask him to show us how to bring his light into the dark places of discrimination, unsustainability and unbelief. In receiving Christ, we begin a journey of love for God, his people and his damaged, beautiful creation. ¶

Words: the Revd Margot Hodson

The Prodigals' Return

God who dwells in us, and in whom we dwell,
Thank you for the home you have given us
Your beloved earth, diverse creation
Vibrant with love;
Moving through cycles
of life and death, decomposition and regeneration
Serendipity and coincidences
That are so only because we understand so little.
As we behold the destruction we have wrought, we are bereft.
We cannot unsee what we have seen
We cannot undo what we have done,
So we turn to you.
We return to you.
Though we are still far off,
Meet us on the way
Help us to make good; to redeem.
Give us the faith we need, that one day soon
We will find our place on earth,
And live our lives.
Fully live our lives,
In our restoration home.
Amen

What's going on and how should we respond? These are questions we may all have as the impacts of the international pandemic and lockdown play out. While it's too early to tell what will happen as a result, we can be inspired by the actions of churches in our Diocese. See pages 4 and 5 for stories of hope. ¶

*Prayer by Alison Webster
Photo: Shutterstock*

 The John Ray Initiative (which brings together scientific and Christian understandings of the environment) is developing a coronavirus hub of in-depth articles and commentary about the causes, effects and possible solutions to the current predicament. bit.ly/JRliverushub

Out of the woods

I guess it started when I was four. I discovered a blackbird's nest in a herbaceous border in our garden. If I poked it, four noisy little heads shot up – the original jack-in-the-box – captivating! A few years later, I saw starlings feeding on our lawn. They would stick their beaks in the ground before opening them against the pressure of soil to grasp leatherjackets. I wondered how they had the strength to do that. Years later, I learned they have specialised muscles. The childhood fascination with nature turned to an admiration and love of it.

Through my teens, birds were my life. I read Environmental Biology at Aberystwyth, immersed myself in the countryside with red kites, pied flycatchers and dippers. I trained as a bird ringer. I went to Aberystwyth in 1976, the year an Oxford zoologist, Richard Dawkins, published *The Selfish Gene*. By graduation, everyone was talking about it, and I had read it. It troubled me, and I spent the next 40 years discerning what is wrong with it. In brief: the biology is fantasy, the philosophy lacks rigour and the theology is cheap. Its thesis denies life value and purpose, the things that bless my relationship with nature. But the book did one wonderful thing for me. Through his gratuitously atheist rhetoric, Richard Dawkins unwittingly introduced me to Christ. As a Jewish 'apathetic' I had little interest in religion until he focused my attention on it.

In 1981 I became a part time field assistant in Oxford, studying bird ecology in Wytham Woods for my doctorate. The next thirty years working

in Wytham were formative for me. I spent long hours alone in the cathedral forest. Under a fan vaulted canopy of oak, ash, beech and lime, I was led from the apparent superficiality of academic questions, through the gaze returned by a bird in my hand, into a deeper relationship of knowing. I reflected on whether this small, wild miracle of life might know my only concern was for its welfare. I was productive academically at that time, but I remember thinking in 1997: "So is this it? Is this my life?"

I now see that God heard that prayer, for soon after everything changed! I started to teach, which focused my attention on the humanity from which I had retreated to the woods. My life began to resonate with the growing understanding and experience of the Christ I'd found in the woods. I joined a church and was baptised in 2000. As my academic career changed course and deepened, others recognised God's call on me: the call to be a Franciscan and a priest. So how do I see my life's story at this point? God answered my prayer, leading me out of the woods to share the peace of the forest with a world that has lost touch with its roots in faith and nature. He taught me that if I want the world to love birds as much as they love people, I must learn to love people as much as I love birds. ¶

As told to Pathways by the Revd Professor Andrew Gosler, Associate Professor in Applied Ethnobiology and Conservation at the University of Oxford, Fellow in Human Sciences at Mansfield College, Curate in the Benefice of Marston and Elsfield.



We'd love to hear how others helped you on your journey to faith. Send your stories to communications@oxford.anglican.org



Image: Albert Butcher

Reconnect with creation

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