

choose**life**

WORSHIP AND ACTION FOR CREATION



Diane Craven and Johannes Nobel

choose**life**

WORSHIP AND ACTION FOR CREATION



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME



DIOCESE OF
YORK

This publication was made possible through a generous grant from the
Diocesan and Environmental Projects Fund of the Church of England
Environment Programme.

Copyright © 2024

Diane Craven and Johannes Nobel

All rights reserved

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible;
Anglicized Edition, Copyright © 1989, 1995 National Council of the
Churches of Christ in the United States of America.
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Design & artwork: Mark Comer Design4Print

Additional photographs purchased from the Adobe Stock Library

Printing: North Wolds Richardson Group, Pocklington

Printed on Revive 100 recycled silk paper

Contents

- 7 Foreword
- 9 Introduction and how to use this book
- 13 Advent: The ending and the beginning
- 33 Christmas: All creation worships
- 55 Epiphany: Travelling light
- 69 Ordinary Time: The power of everyday choices
- 79 Lent: Choosing life
- 101 Easter: Hope in the garden
- 121 Ascension: On Earth as in Heaven
- 126 Pentecost: The groaning of the Spirit
- 142 Ordinary Time: 'The great green growing season'
- 151 Trinity: The dance of creation
- 165 Creationtide: Celebrating creation
- 185 Christ the King: The cost of leadership
- 194 Resources

Foreword

The climate crisis dominates headlines in so many different ways, and it should part of the church's headlines, too. One of the questions facing Christians and facing the Church is how we talk about this within the context of worship.

Genesis speaks of God lovingly creating the world, and that when God looked at the creation, God declared it 'good'. If creation is good, we need to work better to understand our relationship with the Earth and how care for creation is part of the church's mission.

We care for the Earth, not only because we rely on it to sustain life, but because the whole cosmos is part of God's salvific action. Everything – the whole of creation – is interconnected and interdependent. The new heaven and new earth are not only about humanity, but about the earth itself, the world and all that dwells on it.

Worship shapes us. It is one of the prime ways in which we are formed and fed as disciples of Jesus. This resource offers the opportunity to bring climate justice and care for the creation into our worship. Living Christ's Story is about becoming more like Christ, developing habits that share in God's care for the whole earth. The fifth mark of mission clearly calls us beyond spiritual well-being to 'strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the Earth'. May these worship resources enable us to go out with joy as we celebrate the wonders of the world that God has made.

Stephen Cottrell
Archbishop of York



Kintsugi - Restored Creation

The Japanese ceramic craft of kintsugi (golden joinery) or kintsukuroi (golden repair) uses precious metal to reunite broken pieces of pottery – not to hide the breaks but to give them a new beauty. Images of kintsugi have been used throughout this book because they represent so powerfully the possibility of healing and restoration. Jesus, in his resurrected body, continued to carry the physical marks of his crucifixion. Even as the glorified king of all creation, his wounds are visible, but with their own beauty. The new creation is a renewed and restored creation – not a replaced creation.

*I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth;
do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.*

(Isaiah 43:19)

*And the one who was
seated on the throne said,
“See, I am making all things new.”*

(Revelation 21:5)



Introduction:

Connecting with Creation
through the Church Year

**We are going on a journey.
Are you ready?**

Setting out

The preparations have (hopefully) been done and from the moment we shut the door behind us, we are on our way. But what does it mean to be setting out on *this journey* – into the stories and rhythms of the church year and through the seasons and changes of nature all around us? Making a good journey asks that we give time and attention to what we observe around us and that we listen to the living messages that call us to live more peaceably on the Earth.



Walking reminds us of our connection to the Earth, of our rootedness on the ground and of the call to tread gently and live in harmony with God's created order:

“As shoes for your feet, put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.”¹

We are called at every turning of the way to choose life: living in

peace with each other and with the Earth which is our common home.

Seasonal patterns

The Church of England has ordered its liturgical season around the patterning of the changing seasons and their rhythms of light and darkness; ploughing and reaping; sowing and pruning. The Church Year can help to take us closer to the rhythms and changes of the seasons in nature – although these seasonal changes have been disrupted by climate change and extreme weather events. As we travel, we should take time to attend to the changing activity in nature and the signs of God's active presence within creation and all the wonders it contains. In a world where we are so often disconnected from the earth we live on, learning to pay closer attention to the changes around us can be a helpful practice. We are reminded, as the seasons turn, that God is continually active and present, upholding all creation. The changing seasons also offer us a way of interpreting the seasons of our own growth and remind us at every age and every stage of our journey to care for the world around us and for the people with whom we share this planet.

Endings and beginnings

Advent sees the ending of the past year and the beginning of a new Church Year. We arrive here after the past year's journey. We

also set off again from here to live and work for the reconciliation of the whole creation, as part of living out God's mission in the world. We will be taken deeper into the heart of our God, who is Trinitarian relationship, and who calls us into deeper relationship with one another and with the world. The Advent call to 'wake up' reminds us to listen to God's call and to be ready for action to protect our planet that is suffering from our self centred and exploitative ways of living. We might then begin to discern God's longing for the healing of creation and the restoration of our cities and neighbourhoods. It is our task in the year ahead to look for the signs of God's healing amongst the brokenness, and then to join in that work.

Choosing life

This story is full of possibility for change and for finding better ways to live – ways that are closer to God's intention for human relatedness and for living in peace with ourselves, with one another and with the world. But from the beginning in the Garden of Eden, we see that human choice and waywardness has led to brokenness – including broken relationships between humans and God, between humans and other humans, and between humans and the creatures of the earth. We are called to lament for all the brokenness brought about by our choices; called to lament our failures and sin; called to lament

the loss of habits and ecosystems and the part that humans have played in this destruction. Yet there is always wonder at God's infinite love, abundance and mercy expressed in the spectacular beauty and diversity of insects, plants, flowers, fish, mammals and creatures on our Earth and at the renewal that is often at the heart of nature. Our worship and our discipleship during the year will need to express both lament and wonder; voicing more faithfully the rhythms of God's story and our own and God's abiding presence at the heart of it all.

All together

We make our journey as God's pilgrim people: people of all ages and stages, learning together how we can live in ways that better reflect God's purpose for the whole of creation. We are called together to hear and respond to God's call for justice for every generation and for every community, especially as the worst impacts of climate change will fall disproportionately on younger generations and on the poorest communities. The passion with which many children and young people are articulating their concern for the future of the planet presents adults with a challenge. We are asked to face our own responsibilities towards the planet and all its peoples and creatures. We are invited together to find ways of weeping and rejoicing. We are also invited to explore ways of working for the transformation of ourselves, our church and our

world. Above all, we are to tell, live and be the story of God's deep love for the world and for every creature that lives, moves and breathes upon our planet. Sustained by this story, we can then go and share it in a world that is longing for hope, healing and change.

How to use this book

Please use this book as your guide for the journey through the liturgical year. Each chapter is divided in three parts: In the first section you will find an introduction to the particular themes of the season. Then follows a section containing ideas for Action. Lastly, each chapter concludes with a suggested liturgy and ideas for Worship.

- Introduction
- Action
- Worship

Action

Each section with Ideas for Action follows a repeated pattern: It starts with Take 1, which is the main suggestion for an intergenerational action or response to our journey through this liturgical season. Following on from Take 1, you will find Take 5, which is a series of suggestions for further explorations. Take 5 offers you the choice to: 1. Connect; 2. Contemplate; 3. Create; 4. Reflect; and 5. Respond.

Worship

The worship section contains a wide range of suggestions for worship. Where possible we have tried to make the worship intergenerational. After all, we are in this together!

Prayer of blessing for the journey

As you make your journey, may God come so close to you and you come so close to God that you know all of God is in every place – in all of creation.

May you always carry with you the gifts given to you before you were born by the man who said such amazing things and did such wonderful things that people still know him in every season, in every mystery, in the bread and the wine.

You are storytellers and peacemakers, light bearers, and people of God, who are creating the part of the story that hasn't been written yet.²

Amen

¹ Ephesians 6:15

² <https://buildfaith.org/godly-play-blessing-for-end-of-program-year/>

Advent:

The ending and the beginning



Through darkness to light

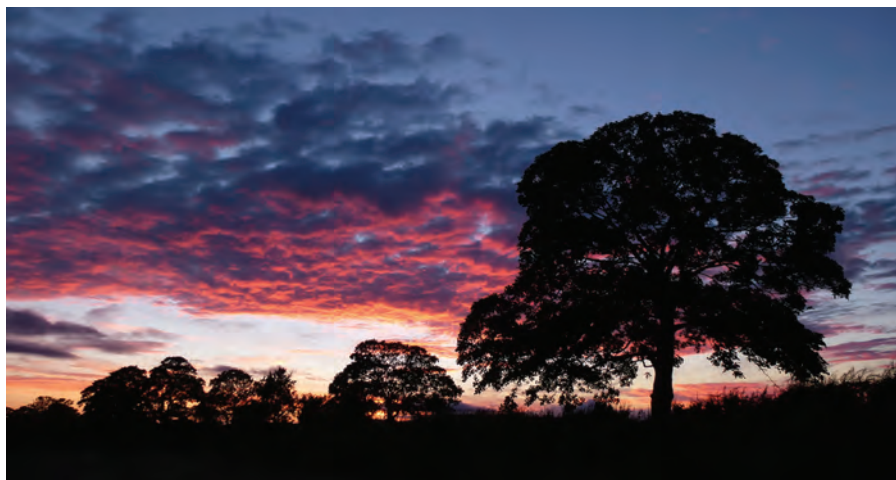
So we begin the part of our journey that takes us (in calendar terms) into the darkest time of the year. The weather is bleak, the nights are long and life moves into hibernation mode. Spring seems a long time away. We find ourselves in a curious in between time: in a season of reflection on the year that is moving towards its end; with Christmas in the not-too-distant future but in the darkness with the promise of spring light still a long way off. Many of us hurry through these weeks in a flurry of pre-Christmas activity and we often fail to stop and listen to God's song of judgement and hope that comes to us in the dark and in the dying back of things.

We are given a picture in many of the readings for these weeks of Advent of a world that we

long to see become a reality – a world of peace and justice; a world where we chose right ways of living and relating; a world where resources are shared and no one goes hungry. Readings and themes change depending on which Lectionary year we are in. However, there are some underlying images that run through Advent. These images resonate with the call for climate justice, the sharing of resources and the call to repentance for all that has contributed to our broken world. The Advent longing for a better world has an environmental focus as we look for God's transformation of our world and for the renewal of creation.

Marking time

Advent is an inward season: a time to reflect and ponder before the festivities of Christmas and the



joy of welcoming the Christ child. Like anyone looking forward to welcoming a new life, there is a pause for anxious imaginings. Life right now is uncertain and the future seems threatening unless we can change our habits and our lifestyles. The planet is suffering. It seems a dangerous place for new life to flourish and the responsibilities for addressing the problems adults have created will fall on the young. And yet this is where our fragile hope rests.

There is a 'time shift' feeling to the weeks of Advent – a 'now-and-not-yet' in terms of the kingdom of God, its presence with us and its 'not-yet-in-all-its-fullness' quality. This is a wellspring of our longing for the healing of creation and for justice so that 'sorrow and sighing shall flee away'.¹ In this 'in between place', the clock is ticking: now is the time for us to wake out of sleep and to renew our vision and our hope so that 'the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad'.²

End times?

It is also a time to ponder the end of things when time comes to an end and Christ returns in glory to establish a new heaven and a new earth. The original themes of Advent – Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell (the four last things) – may seem stark and hard but given that time is running out for us to address existential threats,



we are living in a kind of 'end time'. In an article on November 2021, the novelist Ben Okri wrote this:

'For we are on the verge of losing this most precious and beautiful of worlds, a miracle in all the universe, a home for the evolution of souls, a little paradise here in the richness of space, where we are meant to live and grow and be happy, but which we are day by day turning into a barren stone in space'.³

'Wake up and be ready' is a central call of the scriptures for this season. It seems particularly apt given the scale of the environmental disaster that is looming and the shortness of the time we have left to take appropriate action. Indeed, time itself is a feature of many of the readings in this season. The time for us to wake up is now. The time for us to look for the coming of Christ is now. The time us to call on the name of the Lord is now.



Our longing for a world made whole runs through many of the scriptures of the season like a golden thread. Rather than destruction there is hope; the city is renewed; the lamb lies down with the lion; we are led by a child. It is time for us to align our desires with God's. It is time for us to commit ourselves afresh to the work of renewing the world and living in peace within it. In terms of care for creation, it is time for change.

We can sometimes feel overwhelmed by the scale of the task and worry that our small efforts will not be enough. As Greta Thunberg wrote: 'no-one is too small to make a difference'.⁴ Building a movement of hope relies on each one of us listening for God's prompting and then working out how we should respond. As Christian communities, we need to give more attention to the theological task of imagining what

a better future might look like. Advent presents us with images that can help to start the process of what Ben Okri has called 'existential imagination'.⁵ Jesus suggests that we should observe the fig tree and consider the signs in the world around us. We must pay attention, hear the cry of our planet and recognise the wrong choices that lead to ashes instead of garlands and make ruins where there should be flourishing.⁷

Generational justice

A shift in the mood of Advent occurs after Advent 3, as we turn our thoughts towards the coming of Christ. On 17th December, we remember the work of Eglantyne Jebb, social reformer and co-founder with Dorothy Buxton of Save the Children.⁸ In 1906, Eglantyne Jebb's work was remarkable for its focus on the inequality that resulted from

poverty and for her activism and campaigning to make a difference to the lives of refugees, especially to the lives of displaced children. The charity she co-founded in 1920 works today in war torn countries across the world.

Eglantyne Jebb urged Save the Children not just to save children from danger and hardship but also 'to place into their hands the means of saving themselves and so of saving the world.'⁹ Her passion to alleviate the suffering of children drove her to create the Declaration on the Rights of the Child which was endorsed in 1924 by the League of Nations, the forerunner of the United Nations. Christians believe that God so loved the world that he became child for us. Recognising the vulnerability



of this child reminds us that God's priority is fixed upon what is least significant in the eyes of the world. Children are harmed by adult wars and conflicts. Children born this year will face a much-changed world and a much less secure future on the planet because of the action and inaction of previous generations. Saving the planet is an act of generational justice in keeping with the Advent scriptures and calling.

Working for shalom

At this time of the year we can hear again the story of the beginning and the end and God's purposes for the whole of creation. It is a time for us to recognise the power of small choices in God's good purposes – being ready like Mary to say 'yes' to becoming part of God's creative and redemptive plans. As we do so, we find the accompanying presence of God with us in our Advent journey of longing and hope as we travel towards the brightness of the coming of Christ both at Christmas and at the end of time as king and judge. It is for each one of us to work out what it means to choose life and to make a pathway for God in the wilderness.¹⁰ This choice is not only for ourselves and for our own wellbeing, but for future generations and for the health and preservation – the shalom¹¹ – of the whole planet.

Prayer

God of eternity
shaper of stars and planets
creator of all that is
you are the beginning and the end.
All time and all of creation are made by you
and you hold our lives in your hands.
Teach us to trust your call to us;
to watch for the signs of the times;
to hear the rumours of your coming glory
amongst the realities of our daily lives.
When our social fabric is torn
and we are overshadowed by fear for the future
may we stand in solidarity
with all who dare to dream
of a world where no one goes hungry
and in our communities, may we live out
the upside down priorities of your kingdom
where a little child shall lead us.

Amen



TAKE ONE

Explore the stories of creation

The Christian story starts and ends with creation: the pattern is creation: fall – redemption – renewal of the whole creation. The two creation stories we find in Genesis are stories for all of us, whatever our age or stage, because they tell us about what our relationship with the world and with one another should look like. At the heart of the second creation story is a choice and its consequences. Adam and Eve are permitted to eat from any of the trees in the garden, except one. The consequences of human choice lead to the brokenness of the relationships that we were supposed to enjoy for ever. Understanding this brokenness and the call to more faithful living on the earth should be central to discipleship from an early age. Care for creation is a God-given responsibility and at the heart of our worship of God who makes

all things, places them ‘under our feet,’¹² and ask us to walk gently. But if the call to faithful stewardship is going to be heard across generations, we need to get the story out from the toy box and wonder together – young and old – about a better way to live and



about how to work together for the restoration of what has been broken.

Try different biblical versions and consult children's books

There are many creative and beautiful ways of telling this story, and of exploring how the story sits alongside what science tells us about our origins. Tell the story in children's groups; tell it together; ponder it for yourself. Read it, draw it, paint it, question it and write in response to it. Sometimes it helps to try a different bible translation e.g. The Lion Storyteller Bible or The Message. Unfamiliar words can surprise and challenge us to think differently. Children's books contain some beautiful illustrations that inspire the imagination and make clever use of language. Tried and tested examples include:

Marion Dane Bauer, *The Stuff of Stars* (Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2018). This book describes creation in relation to the big bang and is a very poetically told version of the creation story. In a creative and open way, it links biblical themes with some of the alternative version of the story that science tells us and demonstrates the incredible chance that makes Earth capable of sustaining life: "a fragile blue planet we call Earth."

Oliver Jeffers, *Here we Are: Notes for living on planet Earth* (London: Harper Collins Children's Books, 2020).

Full of gorgeous illustrations and captivating storytelling. This places Earth within our solar system and explores the land-sea composition of our planet. What would you include in your list of guidance for the best ways to live on the planet?

Isabel Otter, *Dear Earth* (London: Caterpillar Books, 2021).

Grandpa, who was once an explorer, and his granddaughter Tessa explore aspects of the created world: the sea; water and the oceans; land and animals; mega beasts and tiny creatures; ice; mountains; underwater forests; deserts; the rainforest and birds. Tessa is writing her 'Dear Earth' letter about the harm and the hope that rests in humans. Invite members of the congregation write their own 'Dear Earth...' letters. This works in children's groups and as an intergenerational activity.

Desmond Tutu, *Let there be Light* (Grand Rapids, MA: Zonderkidz, 2014).

'God's love bubbled over when there was nothing else...out of this love God spoke.' This book retells the story we find in Genesis 1 with fantastic illustrations full of colour and imagination (also well-chosen adjectives and some similes). This

would work with church groups as the images are so striking. It is also great for multi-cultural images of humans.

Dai Wooldridge, *God's Brilliantly Big Creation Story* (London: SPCK, 2021).

This book has terrific images of the solar system in it. Told in a colloquial, direct and rhythmic way with interesting use of rhyme that makes the story memorable. Great use of humour and a vivid video available on YouTube. This would work well with intergenerational groups.

Godly Play has a script for the creation story which you can learn and tell. You can buy the plaques used in telling the story or make your own using templates.

Find out more here <http://mirandathrelfallholmes.blogspot.com/2013/06/godly-play-creation.html>

Here is a link to a copy of the script <http://incarnation-gaffney.org/Godly%20Play/Creation.pdf>

And you can purchase plaques to paint here <https://shop.stmichaelsworkshop.com/products/a3ak-creation-plaques-set-of-7-kit>

Adult bible study

Equipping Christian Leaders in and Age of Science (ECLAS) has produced a bible study series which explores Genesis 1 and 2

and other creation scriptures in the light of science, written by Tom and Julie McLeish. You can find the pdf here <https://www.eclasproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Where-Science-Meets-Faith-small-groups-course.pdf> It is a great resource for discussing the interface between science and faith. As Professor McLeish has commented: 'When we do science, we participate in the healing work of the Creator'.¹³

Going further

In the Resources section at the end of this book, you will find a list of books which explore the theme of creation in more theological and biblical detail. You might like to explore some of these and consider the following questions:

- What does it mean to be made in the image of God?
- How should we understand what it means for us to 'subdue' the Earth and have 'dominion' over creatures?
- How can we avoid 'domination' and embrace 'loving care' of creation?

TAKE FIVE



1. CONNECT

Climate justice

Find out about the work of Christian Aid on Climate justice. You will find simple actions that you can take to join in with their campaign work on climate justice together with resources for individuals and churches including ideas for churches to download and watch.

The websites of Christian Aid and Tear Fund contain short movies which highlight the human cost of change. Why not screen this in your church as part of a film and discussion evening in Advent?

Riding Lights Theatre company has kindly made a film of their play, *Baked Alaska*, available online. It explores – with great humour – the breadth of issues we face while calling for justice for all on our planet. <https://ridinglights.org/baked-alaska/>

Perhaps you could precede the screening with a simple lunch, and follow it with a group discussion? The Sunset Vigil liturgy at the end of the chapter offers a profound act of worship to end the afternoon.

There are resources for schools and for small groups to help you to begin an exploration of the issues.

The film (and questions that follow it) entitled *Wake up call* in the small group materials is particularly relevant to the season of Advent. This is a season when we are called to wake up, to be ready and to watch for the signs of the times. What better way to start than by reading the science, contemplating the signs of destruction and hearing the call of God?


2. CONTEMPLATE

The heavens are telling the glory of God



Staring into the dark sky and seeing pinpricks of light that have travelled to us across the galaxy is an eye opener to the vast distances of space and the amazing fact that we live on a planet that can sustain life. Finding a place that is less likely to have light pollution is a fantastic way to see the map of the stars above you. However, you can simply look up from wherever you are – look up through your window; look up when waiting for a bus; look up when you pop down the road for some milk... and notice the pattern of the stars in the night sky and the shape and brightness of the moon.

The International Dark Sky Association is working to raise awareness that many children will not grow up able to see the Milky Way where they live because of our wasteful insistence on such overlit cities. You can read about their work here: <https://www.darksky.org/light-pollution/> and



download a leaflet about the damage that light pollution causes to animals and humans <https://www.darksky.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/IDA-General-Brochure-English-06-2021.pdf>

Looking up to the heavens at night is an experience that can be extremely calming, offering a sense of connectedness to the 'bigger picture' and helping us to see ourselves as a small but important part within the vastness of the universe. Give thanks to God for his everlasting love for each one of us in such an enormous universe. The Bible tells us that God names and calls out the stars: 'He counts the numbers of the stars, He gives names to all of them.'¹⁴ God's

action of naming the stars tells us that each one is significant within creation and distinctive in its own right.

Finding your way around

1. Begin by finding North and placing a lounge chair North-South then lie on it with your feet pointing towards North.
2. Take a few moments to ground yourself on the earth. Breathe in deeply several times. Let your eyes adjust to the altered light.
3. Lift up your eyes. Look at the hugeness of the sky the vast spaces over your head. Notice the small points of light emerging from the darkness. As your eyes take in the marvel of



the map of stars start to focus gently on one constellation. In the northern hemisphere in Winter this could be the Plough or 'Big Dipper' in the constellation of Ursa Major, the Great Bear. Some people describe it as a 'dot-to-dot' image of a saucepan! The Plough is close to the North Pole of the sky so it is always visible: a sign of constancy in a changing sky map.

4. Take a moment to notice the individual stars that make up this shape the brightness with which each star shines and the beauty of the shape they make together which has been a point of reference for travellers through the ages.

How to begin an outdoor exploration of the night sky: practicalities

This is an activity that you could organise as a parish although it is always harder to see stars in the city than in the countryside because of light pollution. Some travel may need to be involved. Light pollution is a talking point in itself and you could discuss questions about the ownership of space and the environmental damage that space tourism could cause. The following link offers an educational resource for work with young people which considers the issues in a balanced way: <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/blog/is-space-tourism-good-for-the-planet>

1. Some basic knowledge about the position of stars and planets is helpful before you start. The National Trust has a useful guide which you can find here <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/top-tips-for-stargazing>
2. Think about the timing for your exploration – not at full moon when there is too much light in the sky but when there is a crescent or gibbous moon.
3. Ten top tips can be found here: <https://www.skyatnightmagazine.com/advice/skills/stargazing-top-tips/> If you intend to involve children in stargazing, you will find useful advice here: <https://www.skyatnightmagazine.com/advice/skills/stargazing-for-kids/>
4. You do not need expensive equipment – eg a telescope but some basic items of equipment are helpful such as a red light so that you can find your way; binoculars; star charts or planispheres for locating constellations and asterisms or you might like to make use of a stargazing app.
5. You might like to reflect on some words from Psalm 8:
When I look at the heavens,
the work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars that
you have established;
What are humans that you
are mindful of them,
Mortals that you care for them?

3. CREATE

Advent wreath

Create an Advent wreath and use this in the home with an environmental prayer focus.

What is an Advent wreath?

At the darkest time of the year, people traditionally took greenery into their homes to remind them that there was hope that life would continue and that eventually things would grow again. An Advent wreath can be constructed in a number of ways, e.g. Live greenery twisted into a circle using small glasses in which to place led lights; Floristry circles or Metal hoops filled with moss.



As you make this you might like to reflect on the meaning of the Advent wreath – evergreens as a sign that life would return to the earth; a circle to show God's unending love as God; the candles as lights of hope in the darkness of winter and as signs that light itself will return to the earth in spring. There are many different versions of prayers that can be used around the lighting of the candles week by week. Common Worship contains several sets of prayers. Here is a lectionary-based set which includes imagery of creation, sky, wilderness and more.

PRAYERS FOR LIGHTING ADVENT CANDLES

Advent 1

We light this light in the name of the everlasting Word – stilling chaos; forming the earth and calling forth light from darkness. Alpha and Omega, author and ending of all that is made, now yearning for the birth of a new creation.

Fill us with longing for all things to be restored and speak the hope of the kingdom deep in our hearts; that as we wait for your purpose to be revealed we may live each day in the light of your coming; so your glory may be seen in all the earth.

O God, who in Christ makes all things new by the Spirit's power,
our hope is in you for ever.

Amen.

Advent 2

We light this light in the name of the word of truth,
a voice that cries in the desert wind and in the wilderness,
calling us to return to you with all our hearts.

Open up a straight path into our lives
and judge us with justice and mercy, O God,
that knowing ourselves welcomed in love by you,
we may live in peace in the world you have made
and reach out to the least and the lost
as a sign to the world that you are our God.

O God, who in Christ calls us and brings us home
In the Spirit's freedom,
our hope is in you for ever!

Amen.

Advent 3

We light this light in the name of the word of grace;
burning with fire in the mouth of the prophets
to renew our lives in the love of God.

Take away judgement, O God our Redeemer.
Give us joy instead of mourning
and restore your image in us.

Teach us to treasure the gifts you have given us
and to walk gently on the earth
that we may shine with your glory and know you as the one who
provides.

Bearing the fruits of true repentance
may we speak the good news of your coming with great rejoicing.

O God, who in Christ comes to save
in the strength of the Spirit,
our hope is in you for ever!

Amen.



Advent 4

We light this light in the name of the Word of life;
the everlasting God, who called worlds into being and stars beyond all
number.

He it is who loves us, counts the hairs of our head
calls us each by name and will bring us home,
gathering us in his arms as a mother gathers her children.

O Emmanuel,

whose coming was announced in the message of the angel;
make us alive to your presence and ready to receive you;
that as we hear your voice we may like Mary say 'yes' to you
and be bearers of the word to a world in waiting.

O God, who in Christ will exult over us with singing
in the joy of the Spirit,
our hope is in you for ever!

Amen.

Christmas Day

We light a light in the name of the Word
that at the start of all things
brought light and life into being.

Emmanuel, God with us,
creator of all that is made
and shaper of worlds beyond imagination
You have come to be at home with us.

O God, who in Christ came to make all things new
by the breath of the Spirit
our hope is in you for ever!

Amen.

4. REFLECT

Pruning and planting



Cutting back and pruning are part of the routine activity for this time of year for gardeners. How can we reflect on our church life in ways that examine what we need to let go of in order to receive the new life that God intends for us? This is a question for us as individuals but also for us as church communities in a time when finances and resources are tight and we must look to the future ready for change and prepared to let go of some ways of being and doing that are perhaps getting in the way. In addition as we consider that Earth's resources are finite, how can we prune our lifestyles and our consumption?

Unlimited growth has (literally) cost the earth. Capitalism and the drive for more bigger and better has pushed Earth's resources to their limits and in some cases has led to direct exploitation. It is hard to see how greed and profit which currently drive so much political and corporate decision making can be challenged. This has driven one member of the House of Lords to create a Future Generations Bill. This bill lays out a plan for us to consult as a nation on wellbeing goals and measures for how well the country is faring on environmental, social,

economic and cultural goals. Public bodies would be assessed against these goals and impact assessments would be required for decision making. The overall aim is to stop future generations suffering because of avoidable issues in the areas of concern. You can find out more about the bill here:

<https://d1xmbz6p0lpe7.cloudfront.net/uploads/2021/06/T4T-Facing-Our-Future-Easy-Read-Report-1.4-1.pdf>

Discuss what you would include in a Future Generations covenant in your church groups.

1. What is the future you would like to see children and future generations enjoying and how can we work towards this?
2. Should we see enjoyment of the natural world as a right that all children and young people deserve? If so how can this right be protected?
3. What do adults need to do to ensure that we hand on the world in a better state than is currently projected?

5. RESPOND

Festive food waste



Plan ahead to reduce your Christmas food waste and carbon emissions.

During Advent we start preparing for Christmas. The annual Christmas meal is a happy celebration with friends and family, a true feast. Enjoy it!

It is good to be mindful of the environmental cost of the food we consume. The global food system accounts for one third of all greenhouse gas emissions. It is responsible for 80% of deforestation and 70% of terrestrial biodiversity loss. As extreme weather events become more common, crop harvests fail, and food prices rise, the poorest communities are worst affected. This is a deep injustice, which, if you stop to think about it, could spoil your dinner.

However, we can make a large difference by making small changes to our Christmas and to our meal of Christmas Day:

1. Avoid any food that is air freighted. Make your Christmas meal a British one.
2. Plan ahead. Buy enough, but not too much. If there are going to be leftovers, can they be used in another recipe? If not, can you find any alternatives?
3. Go meatless on Christmas Eve! This is an old Italian tradition

with the idea of cleansing before Christmas Day. Fish is the main course of choice and if you choose fish make sure it is from sustainable sources.

4. The carbon costs of a portion of Chicken or Turkey is much lower than most Lamb, Beef, Pork and Salmon. Better still, consider a plant-based meal. But in each case find vegetarian alternatives for the pigs in blankets, pork stuffing, beef dripping, and beef gravy.

BONUS IDEA

Eco Nativity

Plan together how you might reinvent your nativity scene in ways that help focus our attention on the more hidden ideas of Christmas and the birth of Christ in the midst of a challenging and dangerous world or in a hostile and occupied environment. How can we show the vulnerability of the Christ child in the midst of the challenges of today's world? This is a project that can be explored together and of course you would need to plan this early!

Burned up?

Why should we care for this planet if God intends to give us a brand-new earth? Year B Advent 2 gives us the opportunity to clarify what the Bible teaches. The NT reading is 2 Peter 3:8-15, which seems to state that, at the end of times, the earth will be consumed by fire. But a careful reading of the text tells a different, more positive, story: God's judgement will expose (literally 'lay bare', not 'burn up') and purge all evil from the earth, but God will not destroy his creation.

- In 2 Peter 3:5-7 the coming judgement is compared to Noah's flood. Note that creation survived the flood and remember that God promised to 'never again' destroy life in this way (Genesis 9:11).
- In numerous passages throughout the Bible, the language of 'burning' is used symbolically, not literally, e.g. in Malachi, 'see, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts' (Malachi 4:1).
- The 'elements' Peter speaks of are not 'material particles', but rather the principalities of this evil age – what St Paul calls 'the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers of this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil' (Ephesians 6:12). These will dissolve and melt away in God's judgement.
- There are two Greek words for 'new', *kainos* and *neos*. When Peter speaks about a 'new earth', the word he uses is 'kainos'. Some commentators believe this word is better understood as 'renewed' rather than 'brand new'. The 'new' earth is our own planet, restored and redeemed – not a replacement earth.
- Finally, note Revelation 11:18 in which God's judgement will 'destroy those who destroy the earth'.





WORSHIP FOR ADVENT:

A Sunset Vigil for Creation

As the days are shortening and the sun sets earlier, this vigil is particularly appropriate in the context of Evening Prayer. The liturgy moves from prayers of lament, to intercession for world leaders, to the gospel hope of restoration, and finishes with an affirmation of commitment.

This vigil is also suitable to mark, and pray for, important meetings of world leaders, such as the United Nation's Conference of Parties (COP) or G7 summits.

This prayer was written by the late Desmond Tutu for COP21.

Creator God,
you have called us to be keepers of your Earth.
Through greed, we have established an economy
that destroys the web of life.
We have changed our climate and drown in despair.
Let oceans of justice flow.
May we learn to sustain and renew the life of our Mother, Earth.
We pray for our leaders, custodians of Mother Earth
as they gather in [*place*] for their climate talks.
May they negotiate with wisdom and fairness;
May they act with compassion and courage,
and lead us in the path of justice
for the sake of our children
and our children's children.
Amen.

The full print friendly liturgy can be accessed here:
<https://sites.google.com/view/chooselifecreation>

¹ 1 Isaiah 35:10 Year A, Advent 3

² Isaiah 35: 1 Year A, Advent 3

³ Ben Okri, "Artists must confront the climate crisis – we must write as if we are in the end times," Guardian online, November 21 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/12/artists-climate-crisis-write-creativity-imagination>

⁴ Greta Thunberg, "No one is too small to make a difference," London: Penguin Books), 2019

⁵ Okri, "Artists must confront the climate crisis."

⁶ Luke 21:29

⁷ Isaiah 61:3,4

⁸ You can find out about the history of Save the Children and the part that Eglantyne Jebb and Dorothy Buxton played in it here <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us/our-history>

⁹ Source: <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us/our-history> Accessed 14.08.22

¹⁰ Isaiah 40:3 Advent 2 Year B

¹¹ The word shalom is closely linked to the kingdom of God and it is used 200 times in the Bible usually indicating complete reconciliation and wholeness. Our broken world reminds us that the shalom that was God's intention for creation was shattered long ago and yet there is hope that in Christ all things can be made new.

¹² Psalm 8:6

¹³ Professor Tom McLeish, from the website of ECLAS <https://www.eclasproject.org>

¹⁴ Psalm 147:4

Christmas:

All creation worships



Hope at the darkest time of the year

This is a season of joy and hope: a moment of brightness at the darkest time of the year. We are full of wonder that God enters human life in the Christ child and that the creator of all becomes fully a part of the created world in all its beauty and in all its mess. The writer of John's Gospel is keen to emphasise this when he writes: the Word became flesh using the Greek word 'sarx' to emphasise the reality of incarnation in mortal, physical flesh. This then is a story about the divine poverty – kenosis – and the cost of redeeming all creation. This cost resides deep within the heart of God from before the start of things. The incarnation is a wildly risky and generous outpouring of love for the whole of creation.



Where are the animals?

It is a common trick question at this time of year to ask 'how many animals do we find in the Christmas story?' The answer of course is none (biblically speaking) – unless you consider the donkey that took Mary to Bethlehem and the sheep in the fields with the shepherds. And yet...the birth of the Christ child is an act of recreation within creation and an assertion that created things matter – akin to the teachings and spirituality of the Franciscans for whom the mystery and truth of the incarnation were a vital thread in weaving a spirituality that embraced all of creation as God's handiwork. Christ is born to redeem us but also to restore the brokenness of the whole of creation. The carol "See, amid the winter's snow"¹ expresses something of the wonder of the creator stepping into the creation:

Sacred infant, all divine
What a tender love was thine
Thus to come from highest bliss
Down to such a world as this.

Francis created the first Christmas nativity scene in a cave near Greccio in Italy, with a figure of the Christ child and costumed people playing Mary and Joseph and with a live donkey and ox. Francis told the story of the first Christmas to the assembled people inviting them to wonder at the difference that this story could make to their lives. After this, many other places set up a live nativity where people could make their own response to the Christ child. Eventually, this developed into the tradition of nativity scenes in public places and in the home. Over time, nativity scenes expanded to include extra people and additional animals in the scene – shepherds, sheep, camels and magi.


Caring for God's creatures at this time of year

One of the ways in which we can demonstrate creation care in this season is to care for the needs of the animals and birds around the edges of our Christmas celebrations. Birds sometimes struggle to find enough food and if the weather is bleak, many other creatures will also face challenges. In the spirituality of St Francis, we find the call to care for all living

things as brothers and sisters. All creatures are co-inhabitants of God's glorious creation and signs of vulnerability in our midst, requiring our protection. Today, many nativity scenes are political statements commenting on the need for immigrant justice and recalling the vulnerability of the Christ child in the midst of brute power. It is important to remember that the Holy Family become refugees themselves. How might we reimagine our nativity scenes to recognise the realities of our endangered world?

Towards a simpler Christmas?

For all the wonder and joy; the feasting and the family get together, this is often a season of tremendous stress and loneliness. It is also a season that has become incredibly commercialised and a long way removed from the simplicity of God in Christ coming to 'pitch his tent among us'. Christmas, when observed thoughtfully, prompts us to explore our understanding of what is enough and whether our hearts are truly focused on the simplicity at the heart of the Christmas story. At the centre of Christmas is actually a reminder of the cross – the direction of travel from the manger. The vulnerability of the baby in the manger is a living image of the vulnerability of God. The Christ child reminds us of the presence and the vulnerable love



of God at the heart of creation, weeping over the brokenness that sin causes in the world. The fragile child in the manger also reminds us of the fragility of all new life on this planet. Soon Mary, Joseph and the Christ child will flee in fear for their lives – just as many today will flee from places that were previously secure because of war, famine, persecution or climate disruption. In the shadows beyond

the light and joy of the manger, darker forces are gathering:

Child of the stable's secret birth,
The Lord by right of the
 lords of earth,
Let angels sing of a King new-born
The world is weaving a
 crown of thorn:
A crown of thorn for that
 infant head
Cradled soft in the manger bed.²

Prayer

Vulnerable God
mystery from before time began
your love for us is as wide as the reaches of space
yet you know us each one by name
and you call us to be your own.
We see your love for us in the face of Christ
and we praise your love that comes to meet us.
Here, amongst the messy realities of our lives –
one with us in joy and sorrow
bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.
You are closer to us than our own breath
always tender and always true.
We worship you
God come down
God for us
God with us.

Amen

TO PONDER

How should we respond to the fragility of all life in an endangered world?

28 December: The Holy Innocents

This story comes hard on the heels of Christmas and takes us to a place that we would rather not go. It is a story of blood and destruction, of power leading to violence and to the sudden uprooting of the Holy Family, who are forced to run for their lives to escape the murderous intentions of King Herod. Other families do not escape. Children are massacred and the air is full of the sound of weeping. This is not very Christmassy. And yet... perhaps it is our understanding of what Christmas is really about that is at fault.

God's priority for the dispossessed

God's love for the world led to the great risk of the incarnation. God's love always involves risk. That love leads to the cross. When we read that 'the word became flesh' we see a God who is one with us in the worst that can happen in human existence and whose reconciling work comes with high cost. God is still one with us in all the mess, brokenness and destruction that can sometimes surround us. That is so often

where we can find him. God is to be found on the edges; on the margins and with the dispossessed. Not in the safety of a palace with bodyguards; but vulnerable to all that the world might direct at him. Not one with the rulers of the world but one with the least and the lost. Creation itself was an act of vulnerability, requiring our cooperation and faithfulness for its protection.

As we look just a short way into the future, the impacts of climate change are likely to lead to millions of displaced people. That is not scaremongering but fact. UNICEF have shone a spotlight on the impacts of climate change on children's lives across the globe indicating that in 2020 alone,





9.8 million of the 30.1 million new weather related internal displacements³ affected children.⁴ When children are displaced, their rights to education to health and to safety are also disrupted. Looking at this issue through the lens of children's rights, UNICEF calls on countries across the world to commit to the emerging solutions that experts in the field are offering, and urges countries to future-proof the protections that they offer to vulnerable children. One of the most significant things that every country can do is to ensure that they limit their carbon emissions so that globally our emissions do not lead to a temperature increase above 1.5 degrees. Limiting global warming to between 1.5 and 2 degrees could, they argue, protect more than 44 million people from displacement by 2050.⁵

Children and young people at the centre

Save the Children, who work on the frontline across many countries where the impacts of climate change are being keenly felt by children, have stated that children born in 2020 will on average experience 6.8 times as many heatwaves; 2.8 times as many river floods and 2.6 times as many droughts as their grandparents. A recent report⁶ indicates that children were more likely to be physically affected by climate change related events

than adults. As a result of the frequency and severity of natural disasters and the consequences that arise from them, people are often permanently displaced. Many children will never go home again.⁷

Children and young people across the planet are concerned about climate change. The children we work and worship alongside in our church communities are concerned about climate change. Eco anxiety is real and is affecting children. In safe spaces, the least we should be doing in church is listening to their anxieties, to their sense of urgency and to the call of God to save the planet so that children born today will not be displaced but will have a home. We will need to give children and young people our full attention and to hear what they tell us of their concerns for the planet we share. This calls out great resources of love in the adults who accompany children and young people and a genuine intention to pay attention to what we are being told even when it challenges our way of life. Together we can then learn to name the presence of God at the heart of it all.

Today, people in power are using their power against the vulnerable. Today, the effects of climate change are disrupting the wellbeing and safety of children and their families. As the Coventry Carol puts it:

Herod the King in his raging
charged he has this day
his men of might in his
own sight
all young children to slay.
Then woe is me poor child
for thee
and ever mourn and say
for thy parting, nor say nor sing:
by lullay lullay.⁸

Eglantyne Jebb, who with
Dorothy Buxton founded Save
the Children, once wrote that:
'the only international language
is the cry of the child'. If we can
hear that cry in the story of the
displaced Christ child then we
can also hear it in our world
today, and respond.

Prayer

Listen!

There is the sound of frightened travellers on the road.
Refugee children and families far from home –
the Christ child is among them on the road to Egypt.

And so we pray

for all who are running for their lives,
and especially for children displaced from their homes
because of danger, threat and climate change.

We pray for the light of Christ to shine
where power is abused and human life is cheap.

We pray for the protection of all who today
are fleeing their homes in terror

and we pray for all whose lives are disrupted as a result of a
changing world.

God of reconciliation and hope,

give courage to relief workers and all who rebuild communities
that have been scarred by violence or cruelty.

May we work for world where every child can flourish

giving thanks that you answer our prayers

by making a home in our hearts and lives

and calling us to open our hearts to the cry of the Christ child.

Amen

TO PONDER

**What does this story teach us about our own
responses to the threat of displacement?**

New Year

On the other side of failure

What are your new year's resolutions? The idea of starting again and of reassessing our lives with the hope of letting go of past regrets, and possibly taking up new challenges, is well embedded in secular consciousness. Too often resolutions do not last any longer than a week or two, but sometimes, they stick and result in changed habits and more faithful living, or in choices large and small that, for Christians, take us closer to living in the way that God intends for us. Nevertheless, no matter how much we manage to embrace the 'new', sooner or later we must realise that we always carry the past with us. Only when we recognise the past do we find the strength to enter a new tomorrow.

The Japanese ceramic craft of kintsugi (golden joinery) or kintsukuroi (golden repair) uses precious metal to reunite broken pieces of pottery – not to hide the breaks but to give them a new beauty. Images of kintsugi have been used throughout this book because they represent so powerfully the possibility of healing and restoration. They show how the broken pieces of our lives, when brought back together, can be a source of strength. The scars we carry are testimony to the challenges that we have overcome. Jesus, in his resurrected body,

continued to carry the physical marks of his crucifixion. Even as the glorified king of all creation, his wounds are visible, but with their own beauty.⁹ The new creation is a renewed and restored creation – not a replaced creation.

This should give us hope. The Bible is full of stories of seeming failures that become the source of a new calling; stories of recalcitrant prophets and reluctant heroes; stories of God's amazing transformation of our small offerings. It is time to present ourselves to God in the face of impending climate breakdown and to present 'the simple offering of (y)our faith green as a leaf', as the poet RS Thomas suggests.



In a similar way to the craft of kintsugi, Ignatian spirituality offers the concept of 'integration' to explore how times of suffering or brokenness can become times of renewal and growth as we work prayerfully with God to do this work of integration in our lives. How might this help us to consider the damage we have done to our planet and to integrate this brokenness with God's calling to start again? How can we gather up the brokenness we see in the world and together recognise the scars we have caused through our forests; across the landscape and in the

hidden places of the planet? What are the precious 'raw materials' (Love? Community? Hope? A concern for the dispossessed? Other?) that we can draw on to repair the damage to the Earth? How then can we integrate these reminders of the damage inflicted by what we choose and what we do not choose into new and more beautiful patterns of living, where we can say that we have turned around from our destructive and self-destructive ways of life and instead embraced God's renewing power for our own lives and for our planet?

Prayer

God of all our days,
as we stand at the start of a new journey
we do not know where our travels will lead;
we do not know what will be needed from us;
we do not know if we are brave enough or strong enough.
We place into your hands all that is broken in our world
our failure to heed your call to care for creation;
and our mistaken choices that lead to death and not life.
Lord, we trust in your promise
that you are always with us;
that you restore what is broken;
that nothing can ever separate us from your love.
May we walk in this comfort
and hope in the possibility of a new beginning
for ourselves and for the world you made.
Amen

TO PONDER

What creation care resolutions will you make?



TAKE ONE A Greener Christmas

From unrecyclable wrapping paper, to tinsel, to plastic toys, to trees of questionable origin, how is it possible to have a green Christmas? The sheer quantity of food that is bought also leads to mountains of waste afterwards and the drive for consumption and for consumer goods presents us all with challenging choices, not least the challenge that our relative affluence presents in a world where many go hungry and where the cost of living makes for stark choices between eating and heating for some. The amount of waste produced after Christmas in the UK increases by 30% and according to the Big Issue we throw away 2 million turkeys, five million Christmas puddings and over 74 million mince pies!¹⁰ Environmental group Hubbub have calculated that approximately 12 million Christmas sweaters are typically bought in the UK but only 2 out of 5 are worn.¹¹ How can we

help our congregations to simplify Christmas and use the season as a time for meeting the needs of others rather than our own wants?

A Rocha's website has some excellent suggestions for simplifying our Christmases – from avoiding 'drastic plastic' to choosing presents that don't cost the earth – literally! There are 24 great ideas on the site that can help us all to follow the principles of sustainability, creativity and generosity.¹² Decide in your households and/or family groups to do one thing to make your Christmas celebrations more eco-friendly. Rent a tree? Make your own cards? Design and print your own Christmas paper? Ideas aplenty here:

<https://learn.eartheasy.com/guides/how-to-have-a-green-christmas/>

<https://arocha.org.uk/ideas-for-a-greener-christmas/>

TAKE FIVE



1. CONNECT

Christmas in a bag

Prepare an eco 'Christmas in a bag' for people who are housebound or for people who do not usually come to church. Fill an eco-friendly paper sandwich bag with festive items, such as:

- A star for the Christmas tree: You can make Crochet stars using this free pattern <https://persialou.com/crochet-star-ornaments-free-pattern/> or make Clay stars using clay made from 65g cornflour, 125g bicarbonate of soda and 180ml water¹³
- In a saucepan, mix the cornflour, bicarbonate of soda, and the water.
- Next, gently heat the mixture on your hob. The consistency will first be that of a soft paste. Keep mixing it until it takes on the consistency of mashed potato.
- Once you've reached the desired consistency (if you're unsure, the mixture will start to pull away from the pan), then remove the pan from the heat immediately and leave to cool. You now have homemade clay!
- Use the clay on a cornflour dusted work surface to create

the shapes you require. If you are using cookie cutters to cut out shapes, then less complex shapes work best.

- If you're planning on hanging your shapes on your tree, or to create a garland, then use a skewer to poke a hole at this stage too.
- Once you have cut out your shapes, leave them to air dry for one to two days. After two days, you can then bake them in oven for around 20 minutes or so at 80°C The cooking time depends on the size of your shapes, so keep a close eye on your creations.
- Remove the decorations from the oven. They should have dried to a white clay texture. This can be left as it is, or you can paint them paint or marker pens.
- An eco-friendly tea light (soy or beeswax)
- A small cross made from twigs or lolly sticks
- An eco-friendly tea bag with an invitation to ponder the world around us
- A forest friendly card with a Bible verse

2. CONTEMPLATE

Nativity animals

In old legends there is a story that on Christmas Eve all creatures are given the power of speech for an



hour. I wonder... what would the animals tell us about our planet and their lives under threat? You might like to imagine the story of Christmas told from the perspective of the animals. Reflect on what messages the animals would tell us if they could talk. (You could refer to the following book: Lee Bennett Hopkins, "Manger," (Grand Rapids: MI, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014). The book contains a range of poems from the point of view of a variety of animals, celebrating Christ's birth. You could also reflect on websites which explore the impact of climate change on wildlife.

See for example
<https://www.gvi.co.uk/blog/7-animal-species-and-how-they-are-affected-by-climate-change/> for images and information.

Reflections on the nativity scene

Look at the whole scene very carefully. Reflect on the journeys that the characters have travelled to get here. Where have they come from? What have they left behind? What dangers have they faced on the way? When they arrived, did they find what they had expected?

What a mixture of people and animals – and an angel – in this scene! What must it have been like to have a new-born child in this place? The animals are quiet now but would make a lot of noise moving around and mooing and braying. And then the baby would cry loudly and piercingly...but for now, all is quiet and the child sleeps. If this scene had sound effects and movement in it, (or even smell effects!) what do you



Nativity by Gentile Da Fabriano 1423

think you might see, hear and smell as you stand here? Look at the image with the angel and the animals. What does this suggest to you about heaven and earth joining together in praise?

Look at the angel. Where has this angel travelled from, winging through time and space, back in time to when the world was made; present in time here to witness the world made new and beyond time and at the end of time...what new things and what new creations would this angel then see? And look at the strength in this angel's arms and wings. No wonder the shepherds fell down on their faces and were afraid. This angel tells good news in all its fantastic drama and glory and knows how much the world will need to hear and to see the message and yet how little attention the world pays to heaven on earth. How can we pay better attention to the wonders in our world?

Look at Mary, at her face and expression. The child looks so small and vulnerable! What might she know (or have guessed) already of the story yet to be told of what would happen to this child and what she would suffer, as she watches him grow and move out into the world, where she will no longer be able to protect him from harm? In some pictures you can see Mary holding Jesus and a shepherd holding his sheep. Jesus was called the Lamb of God and here perhaps is a hint about why Jesus came to

the world. What does this tell us about the cost of redeeming the whole creation?

For any new mother this is a time of joy but also of fear because the child is so helpless and dependent. Take some time to think about what this has to tell us about God – and about the risk God took in becoming a child for us. And what of Joseph? What can you see in his face as he looks at this scene? What is it like to carry such a responsibility and to witness these events?

The animals look on gazing in (relatively) peaceful calm: chewing and ruminating; snuffling and snorting. It is perhaps not too much of a stretch of the imagination to think of animals present or around near the scene of the infant Christ since Christ appears on earth in the midst of creation and has come to save all things and to make all things new. Donkeys were usually thought of as the mode of transport for the poor. Humble and steady they carried people and burdens for miles. If the animals were there and could speak what reminders might they give us of God's plan for all things – people and animals – to be gathered into God's loving purposes for the whole of creation?

You might like to find one 'character' (human or animal) in the scene and consider these things from the point of view of that 'character'.

Does the 'character' have a name?
Where has the 'character' come from? What might this 'character' be thinking and feeling as he/she looks at this scene...

Why might it be important that animals are here?

What would you like to offer to the Christ child?

As you leave, what message will you take with you into the world?

You might like to reflect on the following words from the well-known carol *In the Bleak Midwinter*.

What can I give him,
poor as I am

If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;

If I were a wise man,
I would do my part;

Yet what I can I give him –
give my heart.¹⁴

3. CREATE

Feed the birds



Explore ways of taking care of the birds during this winter season.

<https://www.gardenersworld.com/plants/feeding-garden-birds-in-winter/>

You might like to make your own fat balls to use as food for birds.

Here is a recipe <https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/diy/how-to-make-fat-cakes-for-birds/> and you can also make simple feeders using small terracotta plant pots tied together and then filled with the fat cake mix!

Make sure the birds have enough food to eat and watch them as they visit your food station giving thanks to God for this sign of the amazing wildlife that inhabit the planet with us. This activity is one way to begin preparations for the Big Garden Bird Watch which takes place towards the end of January each year.

You can find out more here <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/>

The RSPB also offers top ten tips on how to attract birds to your garden or outdoor space so that you can prepare in good time to join in the bird watch. Find our more here <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/how-to-attract-birds-to-your-garden>.

4. REFLECT

Crib to Cross

How are incarnation and crucifixion both part of our creation care and of the way we preach and teach about it in this season?
Hebrews 1: 1-4; 10-12; 2:6b-9

There are various theologies of the atonement but perhaps we could reclaim one that helps us to see God's work for all of creation in both incarnation and crucifixion: God's work of liberation. This is rather closer to the theology of the Orthodox church. God came as child to reveal to us his plan for the poorest and weakest to be raised up. Jesus preached a message of good news for the poor and proclaimed a kingdom that challenged the structures of power within his society. He challenged the injustices of Empire, and asked people to live differently according to the values of a kingdom that was 'not of this earth'.

The incarnation reminds us of the cost to God of his work of creation and of redemption. Our wrong choices and structural evils lead to the death of Christ on the cross. But this is not the end of the story: Christ is resurrected. What was seemingly irreversible has been reversed and the place of death becomes the place of life. The God of resurrection makes all things new: a new heaven and a new earth; new creation; new birth;

new covenant, because all things are possible.

The children's book entitled "The Tree Trees"¹⁵ tells the story of three trees that are cut down and made into a manger; a boat and a cross. It weaves a narrative thread between the child in the manger and the adult Jesus. It is a useful way to help children to begin to reflect on how the story of Christmas forms a connected whole with the story of Easter and is another reminder for all of us that the Creator of all things 'became flesh and lived among us.' As Michael Ramsey wrote: 'God is Christlike, and in him is no unchristlikeness at all.'¹⁶ The child in the manger is the Saviour of the world.

The poverty and humility of Jesus, both Christ child and Saviour, is the theological ground upon which Franciscan spirituality is based and is the story that we tell as we seek to live our lives with simplicity on the Earth. How can we make better links between crib and cross in our teaching and learning? How might this change the way we understand our care for the world God made?



5. RESPOND

Find out about the carbon costs of travelling



As the days slowly start growing longer, our thoughts may turn to the summer holiday season. It is usually around Christmas time when brochures for holidays and adverts for sun-kissed beaches begin to drop through letterboxes or onto computers. It is good to have a regular time of rest, and a holiday inspires and energises us. Even God took time rest and enjoy his creation on the seventh day. This is the principle of the Sabbath – a time set aside for restoration. But how can we ensure that our holiday plans are not at the expense of the earth and its creatures?

Sometimes our time of restoration contributes to the destruction of the planet – especially when we

use aviation to reach our desired destination.

1. Find out the carbon cost of your holiday travel here: https://www.carbonfootprint.com/holiday_footprint.html
2. Consider alternative destinations, closer to home. The British Isles have much to offer!
3. Consider alternative ways of transport to reduce your emissions. The website of Mark Smith, better known as 'The Man in Seat 61' is dedicated to international train travel. Overnight ferry services offer a relaxing environment and a real sense of travel. Why not make your journey part of your holiday?
4. Remember, offsetting emissions is only ever a last resort, when reducing emissions is impossible.

28 December: The Holy Innocents



TAKE ONE

Displaced

After the surfeit of food at Christmas and the seemingly open-ended nature of the time between Christmas and new year, the focus for Christians suddenly moves to a devastating story of displacement and death.

Climate Displacement

On the 28th of December the church commemorates the suffering of the Holy Innocents. The Holy Family escaped the murderous armies of Herod by travelling to Egypt, becoming refugees. God in Christ finds no safe home in the world that he has made and is taken for protection from the light of the birthplace into the darkness of the unknown. You can find the story in the gospel of Matthew: The Flight into Egypt and the massacre of the innocents Matthew 2:1-18.

In today's world, let us pray for those who are displaced because of the Climate Emergency.


Watch this short video produced by The Society of Jesus, or read the transcript below:

“Miriam is a mother, wife and skilled seamstress. She lived in Syria with her husband and two children. Everything changed when drought hit her country. The worst drought in recorded history. Food became scarcer and business

started to suffer. The drought exaggerated political and cultural tensions, and soon war had broken out in her country. In an instant, she and her husband chose to flee from the war and violence. Miriam left everything behind and travelled almost 200 miles by foot to find safety in eastern Lebanon.

This is the story of millions; People who have been forced to flee from their homes because of climate or extreme weather changes. Some are forced to flee quickly, due to a sudden natural disaster, such as a hurricane, tsunami, flood or wildfire. Others are forced to leave their home because the environmental conditions are deteriorating, causing violence and poverty that threatens their safety.

In turn, the climate emergency is converging with other threats to drive new displacement and increase the vulnerability of those already forced to flee. Increasingly more and more people are now pushed to move against their will. Since 2008 each year an average



of 21.5 million people have been forcibly displaced because of weather-related and often sudden onset disasters. In the last decade alone, there has been more than two times as many people displaced due to climate related events, than conflict and violence alone.

Sadly, the millions of people who are displaced by climate and weather events, don't have the same protections under international law. Many will not have the same rights to seek Asylum or Refugee status. Climate disasters, are projected to double the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance to over 200 million each year by 2050. Predictions for how this issue will develop in the future are dire, and show just how urgent it is to take action right now."

You can read more about the impact of the changing climate on displacement here: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/climate-change-and-disasters.html>

Leaving home

Climate change will force more people from their homes in the coming year as a result of rising sea levels, floods, extreme weather events or food and water scarcity resulting from the changes to the climate. When we think about climate displacement it is often in the abstract. But the issues may become very real for each one of

us: if you had to run, what would you take with you? If your house was falling down around you, what would you grab as you fled?

What are our essentials – those things we could not live without? What things would be nice to have? And what are only non-essential items?

People's responses to these questions usually centre on memories. Objects that symbolise happy times... Photos and memorabilia of e.g. of an occasion when those who have died were present; a happy memory or an image that represents a loved one. Photos of children or grandchildren (although of course these may be on our phones).

But when there is a journey of 1000 miles, what do we really need? Possessions or the imagination to think of a new life and the hope that you will reach it?

You can read about people making devastating choices because of the dangers to life presented by climate change here

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/02/emergency-bags-packed-for-quick-getaway-activists-fires-floods>¹⁷

New Year



TAKE ONE New commitments

Evaluate the year that has past. Give thanks for all the times when you have been aware of God's guidance and presence with you on the journey. Remember all the things that give you cause for regret and offer these into God's hands. You may have experienced bereavement during the past year – so take some time to recall what you have lost, and offer everything into God's safe keeping.

What gifts can you offer to raise awareness and to protect the planet as this new year begins? What particular action will you take to lessen your carbon footprint?


A creation-focused Covenant Service

In the tradition of Methodism, the start of the New Year is marked with a Covenant Service. During this service the church is challenged to submit everything to God and rely on him alone. The congregation solemnly reads out the poignant words of the Covenant Prayer: "I am no longer my own but yours [...] let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you,

or brought low for you" and "I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal." This is an opportunity to renew personal discipleship and commitment to Christ.

The original Covenant Prayer was written by John Wesley in 1755, using material from the writings of the seventeenth-century puritans divines Joseph and Richard Alleine. Over succeeding generations, the Methodist Church has made changes to the service so that it continues to be relevant to congregations using it. This service lends itself well to introduce the theme of Creation Care for young and old. We are challenged to make a new commitment to act as good stewards of creation. What can we pledge to do for the planet this year?

Throughout the Covenant Prayer runs the theme of restraint and humble discipline. We may need to be prepared to make sacrifices if that is what God's asks of us. What sacrifices do we need to make this New Year, to better care for God's creation?



Perhaps young and old could discuss this in the pews for a few minutes.

Next, people may be invited to write their pledges on paper flower petals or leaves. These, the children may collect to create a colourful collage, which could be displayed to serve as a reminder of the church's green commitments throughout the year.

Perhaps it may also be helpful to reflect on the Ecological Covenant Prayer below or find a time when it can be used in liturgy. Some people will find it difficult to say these words. But we say them in the knowledge of God's loving purposes for all creation. He is the Creator, and we are his creatures. In the face of the Climate Crisis, we affirm our deep need for God to save, help and sustain us all.

Prayer

The earth is not our own but yours, and we are your creatures.
Put us to what you will, rank us with whom you will;
put us to doing, put us to suffering;
let us and all your creatures be employed for you,
or laid aside for you, exalted for you, or brought low for you;
let us be full, let us be empty, let us have all things, let us have nothing;
We freely and wholeheartedly yield all of creation all that we have
and all that we are to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed Creator,
Maker, Redeemer and Sustainer,
You are God and the earth is yours.
So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen

¹ Edward Caswell, 'See, amid the winter's snow', 1858

² Timothy Dudley Smith, "Child of the stable's secret birth". Words Copyright to Hope Publishing Company, Main Stream IL, 1983 1 Edward Caswell, 'See, amid the winter's snow', 1858

³ Internal displacement occurs when people are uprooted from their homes and become refugees within their own country, in need of shelter and basic resources.

⁴ Source: UNICEF Futures at Risk Protecting the rights of children on the move in a changing climate. <https://www.unicef.org/futures-at-risk-climate-report/> Accessed on 14.08.22

⁵ Source UNICEF Futures at Risk Executive Summary https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/FuturesAtRisk_Climate_ExecSummary.pdf Accessed 14.08.22

⁶ Walking into the Eye of the Storm: How the climate crisis is driving child migration and displacement resourcecentre.savethechildren.net Accessed on 14.08.22

⁷ <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/climate-crises-force-rising--numbers-of-children-from-their-home> Accessed 14.08.22

⁸ "The Coventry Carol", fourteenth century. There are many arrangements of this carol but Richard Allain's arrangement has a particularly evocative and haunting quality as does a more modern arrangement by Michael McGlynn.

⁹ See Matthew Bridges, "Crown him with many crowns", 1851, which explores this idea. See also Charles Wesley, "Lo! He comes with clouds descending", 1758. This hymn, often sung during Advent, speaks of the 'glorious scars' that Christ in Glory still carries.

¹⁰ <https://www.bigissue.com/news/environment/how-to-solve-britains-overstuffed-christmas-food-waste-epidemic/> These are 2018 figures and he numbers are likely to be higher now.

¹¹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/how-christmas-is-ruining-the-planet/> Accessed 27/07/2022

¹² <https://arocha.org.uk/our-activities/living-lightly-take-action/christmas/>

¹³ <https://moralfibres.co.uk/how-to-make-homemade-clay-easily-from-household-ingredients/>

¹⁴ Christina Rossetti, "In the Bleak Midwinter", 1872

¹⁵ Angela Elwell Hunt, "The Three Trees," (London: Lion Hudson, 2009).

¹⁶ Michael Ramsey, quoted in John V Taylor, 'The Christlike God,' (London: SCM Press, 2004). 100

¹⁷ Corinne Redfern Your life is under threat. You might have to run at any second. What do you take? Guardian online 02 April 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/02/emergency-bags-packed-for-quick-getaway-activists-fires-floods>

¹⁸ Timothy Dudley Smith, We believe in God the Father (Carol Stream: IL, Hope Publishing Company, 1993).



WORSHIP FOR CHRISTMAS:

God's Gifts in Creation

This service is an intergenerational celebration in the tradition of the well-known Christingle Service.

Preparation notes

Think about how to make your celebration eco-friendly: use recyclable material and think about what will happen to the materials after the service.

You will need to construct four poles representing the gifts of creation. Broom handles and a variety of fabrics and objects will be needed. Try to use contrasting colours for each one. This can be done as a workshop activity for which you will need a range of craft materials. During the activity there are opportunities to reflect on the colour variety and beauty of all that God has made. What colour is a cloud? Where do we find water? Which animal is the most surprising or amazing?

You will need a large candle – the size of the paschal candle and a large length of red ribbon or rope or paper chain made from (recycled) red paper.

During the service, a life-size Christingle will be constructed around a central light.

Play and sing Psalm 104 (Celtic Psalms) as people gather.

The full print friendly liturgy can be accessed here:

<https://sites.google.com/view/chooselifecreation>

Epiphany: Travelling light



Revelation

We celebrate God's revelation to the whole world on 6th January. The Feast of the Epiphany is the time when we tell the story of the journey of the magi as they follow the star and go in search of the Christ child. This is such a powerful image of trust and expectation and of risk and adventure. After this movement from the celebration of Christmas, we enter several weeks of reflection on who Jesus is, what it means to follow him, and what his early miracles reveal about him and his good news. When water is turned into wine, we learn not only that Jesus is God – the all powerful Lord of Creation – but also that he brims over with abundant generosity. His good news is for all and not only 'for us'. And the best is kept for last!

The season of Epiphany is full of images of ordinary things that become signs of the kingdom: water, wine, light, fishing and of course the ordinary people who become bearers of the story of God's transformation of the ordinary. At the heart of it all, Jesus

asks us to walk humbly with him and realign our priorities to reflect the values of the kingdom of God where the last are first and the lost are found.

Walking humbly

One of the readings set for Year A Epiphany 4 is Micah 6:1-8 which includes the following instruction: 'He has told you O mortal what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.' There is a challenging task for us in our parishes to work with this verse and to consider what this might mean for our relationship with those outside the church, our welcome and our creation care. The particular challenge to consider what this means for our relationship with the earth itself needs to be heard. How are we called to 'do justice' in the face of the climate crisis? How can we demonstrate kindness towards the plants, animals and wildlife in our area and kindness in our attitude to resources? What does it really mean for us to walk humbly on the

earth? If the gospel is good news for the whole earth, perhaps we need to start by realising we are not as big as we thought we were; that we share our planet home with a multitude of other living things and that we have responsibility for them and their welfare. With our power in the world comes a great responsibility.

Everyday Epiphany

Sometimes we can encounter God in a powerful way through the beauty or the drama of the environment. We are moved by the sheer size and scale of icebergs; we are awed by mountain peaks and rolling hills descending into lush valleys; we are transfixed by encounters with wildlife; we are amazed by birds in flight and we are grateful for the turning of the seasons and the gifts they bring to sustain our lives. We can meet God in a particular way through the materiality and beauty of the world around us. That is why St Francis spoke of creation as a 'second book' teaching us about the identity and loving purposes of the God who made the world and called it good. The theological word for this is theophany: a revelation of God to humankind often through the very ordinary things in our lives and especially through the creation that surrounds us.

This season we could take time to remember this experience of God that we may have had whilst walking in a wide open landscape; taking a few moments

to connect with what we can see of creation through our windows; to read an inspiring passage of scripture that speaks to us about God's handiwork; looking out to the horizon; staring into the night sky; getting close up to an animal or bird; spending time observing animal behaviour starting with our own pet dog, cat, fish, rat or rabbit. As we read in the book of Job:

"But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you,
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.¹

All we need to do is to stop and to take notice.

Choose life

The weeks after the Feast of the Epiphany remind us of the many different ways in which God reveals God's self to us. Perhaps there is a call in the Sundays that follow Epiphany to reimagine our use of material signs and symbols in worship and to open up the second book of God's word to us by enabling members of our congregations to be out in nature, to ponder and to pray about

what God is saying to the church through their encounters with creation.

The gospel for Epiphany 4 is Matthew 5:1-12 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. This reminds us of the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God described in the parables: the last are first; the greatest thing is the smallest thing; the lost are found and the outsiders take central place at the feast. How might this help us to think about our mission in the world and our relationship with the natural world?

The lectionary for Epiphany 6 includes a passage from Deuteronomy which we have chosen as the title for this resource: 'I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.

Choose life so that you and your descendants might live.² It seems simple – of course we want to choose life and stay alive. Don't we? And yet so many of our choices cause harm and bring about death to ecosystems, rivers, trees, glaciers and icebergs and to animals and plants. Our choices may also damage the wellbeing and flourishing of every human on the planet. Most of the time we live in ways that bring the opposite of life. We choose to eat too much meat; we choose unsustainable ways of living; we choose business as usual. We choose fast fashion; we choose exploitative practices that give us cheap produce and goods; we choose to waste the earth's resources. Our choices matter: God invites us to choose differently.

Prayer

God of pathways lit by starlight;
of our seeking for truth; of our searching for new ways of living;
You are our guide and our destination.
God of offering and sacrifice; gifts and giving;
God of mystery and presence; God of eternity and of now,
we pray that we might follow you more faithfully, love with greater
openness and give all that we have and all that we are with fuller generosity.
God of life and death, as your love in Jesus calls us to follow,
may we turn away from our wrong choices and mistaken directions
and may we follow in the pathways you have set in front of us
and in the strength of the Spirit, choose the road that leads to life.
Amen.

TO PONDER

What does it mean for you to choose life?



TAKE ONE

Counting the cost of our emissions

Measure your carbon footprint

Set up a couple of laptops at the back of church, or ask people to complete an online calculator on their smartphone or at home. Add up the total emissions of the congregation and ask people to make pledges to reduce their carbon emissions or their global footprint. How much can you save together?

How to measure?

There are different ways to visualise our personal contribution to the climate crisis. One way is to calculate the total amount of emissions we are responsible for – our carbon footprint. Another way is to calculate the amount of land

used to provide us with everything we consume (energy, food, homes, travel, the things we buy, etc) – our global ecological footprint.

Carbon Footprint Calculators

The [WWF Carbon Footprint Calculator](#), [Carbon Independent](#) and [National Energy Foundation](#) calculators are effective tools to provide an insight in personal carbon emissions. The results show you which aspects of your life contribute the most heavily to your carbon emissions, so that you know where to make changes first.

Global Footprint Calculators

This way of visualising our personal contribution can be particularly revealing. At present,





the lifestyle of an average UK citizen requires 4.2 hectares of land. If all 7.8 billion people on the planet would live and consume like us, we would need 2.4 planets! Clearly, we use

more than our fair share of the earth's resources. Each year, Earth Overshoot Day marks the annual date when humanity's demand for ecological resources and services exceeds what the planet can (re) generate in that year. In 2022, Earth Overshoot Day was July 28. The [Global Footprint Network](#) helps you calculate your own individual Global Footprint and Overshoot Day.

What to do next?

Online carbon calculators are often quite simplified, and might make assumptions and generalisations. Also, they often don't include the indirect emissions resulting from our lifestyle and consumption. [Climate Stewards](#) offers a more detailed carbon calculator as well as the opportunity to offset carbon emissions. But remember, reducing is better than offsetting!

The [Creation Care](#) website is designed to encourage Christian households to make simple changes to care for God's earth. You can sign up as a congregation, or individually, and complete the questionnaire to see whether you qualify for one of the bronze, silver or gold awards, and where you can make changes.

Many dioceses are beginning to offer [Carbon Literacy Training](#). Contact your Diocesan Environment Officer for more information.

TAKE FIVE



1. CONNECT

Group walk

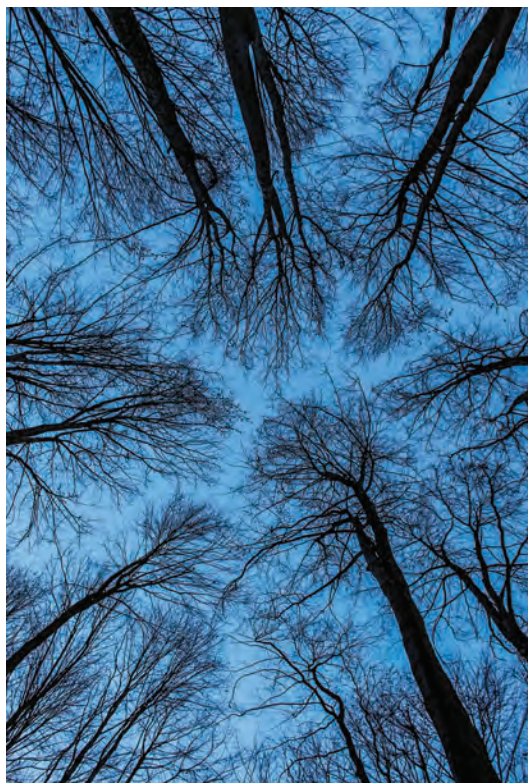
Epiphany literally means revelation. We might tend to think of this as something out of the ordinary, but in fact it is often through close encounters with ordinary things and the right way of looking that we can see the signs of God's presence all around us. There are everyday miracles to be seen if we can only take time to listen and find opportunities to be in nature or even in a quiet space in the middle of a busy city. We can experience simple and deep pleasure from ordinary activities from sunrises and sunsets to the way that shadows play across the ground.

Find a quiet place in your local area. Go and sit there for five minutes and build up the amount of time you spend. Pay attention to what you can see.

Awe and wonder are experiences that give us a sense of wellbeing and peace.³ And we don't need to travel too far to find these experiences. The pandemic showed us that on our everyday walks we noticed living things around us in ways that we have never done before. The habit

of walking regularly in part of your neighbourhood, noticing the shifting patterns of trees and leaves, the plants and birds and the cycles of growth and decay around us, is a helpful part of opening ourselves up and being ready to experience awe. Being in silence in a group at these times is also an incredibly powerful experience.

Organise a group walk from your church community. Ask everyone to look around and to notice the details of things. Focus on the natural environment.



Finding a quiet place and concentrating in being in the present moment can help us to notice just one tree and the shape of its trunk and the solidity its presence; or the birds on a ledge above us, their movement and song; or the interactions of people with their environment. Walking under trees is known to have a powerful, calming effect on the mind. In Japan, the concept of 'forest bathing' or *shinrin yoku* offers people time out to connect with nature.⁴ The Woodland Trust offers guidance on walking in woodland and forest <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2020/08/walking-in-woods/> Church Groups could do this together sharing a simple picnic and short act of worship outdoors. Read Job 38:4-41 or Psalm 148. Share experiences of feeling close to God in nature.

2. CONTEMPLATE

Epiphany: an Examen based meditation



You might like to light a candle and take a few moments to be quiet in God's presence. We come into the presence of God asking for light that is gentle so we can look on ourselves and on the world with compassion.

In silence, we give thanks for the day that has past:
for the opportunities and acts of kindness of today,

for its conversations and its silence
for the light of friendship and family
and for the light of hope that
continues
even when shadows fall across our
path and across parts of our world.
So we offer our thanks for the
past day

Silence

In the light of Christ, we review
the day and the week that has
passed.

What has brought you the gift
of light today? (It might be the
light of new knowledge, a new
experience; a chance encounter;
time to be in nature; a flash of
inspiration or a spark of hope for
our world and its creatures).

We recall these and all other signs
of the warming and revealing light
of Christ in our lives today.

Silence

Now offer to God all the situations
and events that have brought us
darkness and loss today.

The missed opportunities and
mistaken choices;
our failure to live as children of
light and to work for a future in
which we all share. Offer these
now in silence asking that we
might see God's presence in it all.

Silence

And now we take a few moments
to make our heartfelt responses
to God, placing our fears and our
hopes for ourselves and for the

world in which we live Into the hands of the One who brings light from darkness.

Silence

As we look ahead to the next few days and beyond what is it that we most need to inspire us in our creation care and what courage do we need to bring the light of hope to our work to protect the Earth?

O God

May we learn to see and to seek the light in our own lives; may our lives and our work bring healing and light to others and bring healing and light to the task of tending creation; may the light of your love show us the best way way to live on the earth.

3. CREATE



A simple bread making activity

This is such a great thing to do in groups of all ages as it offers some valuable opportunities for reflection and for gratitude to the God who provides for us and gives us enough for each day's needs. The activity itself has many stages in it that have an almost meditative feel: kneading and pulling and the rhythm of push, fold, turn, push, fold, turn...

Bread making places the domestic sphere of activity at the centre of spirituality, just as Jesus taught



through everyday things and taught us to pray for God's daily bread.

You can read about a Methodist Church in Liverpool that calls itself the Bread Church on their website here <https://www.somewhere-else.org.uk>

Bread Church at Wesley Memorial Church has a range of simple bread recipes on their website <https://www.wesleymem.org.uk/about-us/activities/bread-church.html>

Twice weekly, they make bread in groups of people of all ages and abilities, share conversation and refreshments have shared reflection and prayers and then have a simple meal together.

4. REFLECT

Sharing bread



The lectionary sets inspiring Old Testament readings for the Sundays between Candlemas and Lent in Year A.

Not only do we encounter the ‘choose life’ call from Deuteronomy 30:19-20, but we also hear the words of Isaiah 58. These two passages offer us a way of looking at what it means to live as a people of light in a world that is in so much darkness. God’s call to us in the reading from Isaiah 58 to ‘share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house...’ is a reminder that our worship should lead to action to protect the most vulnerable and to take notice of additional impact of climate change across the globe on those least able to deal with the effects.

Concern for the poor and the homeless should inspire us to take action on climate change because this is and will be the greatest driver of injustice, poverty and oppression. Under the climate change projections, maize and bread-wheat will be the most affected crops. There is likely to be a drastic reduction in the yields of both. Over time, tillage has depleted the earth upon which the crop depends. Soil erosion is one of the biggest problems faced

by agriculture. Climate change is making soil erosion worse which in turn leads to further issues. Soil friendly practices and incentives to farmers to work in sustainable ways are needed, together with rehabilitation for damaged land.

What can we do? We can look at the waste we contribute. It is estimated that 28% of the world’s agricultural land produces crops that are wasted.⁵ The website ‘Bread for the World’ is an excellent source of challenging statistics and thought-provoking comment on climate change and world hunger. Although based in the US context, many of the issues and principles apply to us all. A useful pdf entitled ‘Climate Change is a Hunger Issue’ can be found here <https://www.bread.org/sites/default/files/climate-change-principles-2021.pdf>

Isaiah 58:10 offers us God’s promise of light in the darkness if we take up the cause of the world’s poorest and consider our relationship with all of the peoples and creatures on the Earth. In fact there is more...God promises to satisfy us in drought; sustaining our lives so that they resemble well watered gardens and calling us out of this abundance to rebuild and restore the waste places. Living with openness to others and in right relationship with people, creatures and planet is the way to true life. Our lives have to be in balance with the Earth not out

of balance and focused only on our own need, our own desires for more and our own greed for consuming resources.

Questions to ponder together

1. The passage from Isaiah is set within a wider context of God's call to true worship – worship that includes action in the world and becoming the means by which the hungry are fed. How can we put this call into practice in our contexts?
2. What can we do to address the amount of food that we waste thereby contributing to the challenges of producing enough food for all?
3. What challenges are there in this passage to our usual habits of consumption and how can we help each other to develop habits of living with enough?
4. How can we act lovingly to the creatures of the planet and to the earth itself as well as to our neighbours?



5. RESPOND

Conduct an environment audit for your church



Think about the changes you could make as a church community to move closer to your environmental promises and commitments. As a church, what action will you take together to help and what will be your main prayer in the fight to save the planet?

This is an activity that can help take you closer to targets for Eco Church which asks all churches to consider and evaluate their progress towards more environmentally friendly resources and practices throughout the church. This should be an activity that is done with children and young people: including them in evaluating how the whole church is doing in its worship and teaching on creation care and also to look at their own programmes, considering the opportunities that are offered for children and young people to reflect on creation care or to engage in the natural world. You might want to organise an audit of the opportunities on offer to children and young people to engage with or reflect on creation care issues. What do the children and young people need to support them in their care for God's world? As some of them will be involved

in campaigning, we might also need to consider what support children and young people need in taking action or campaigning.

Greening our work with children and young people

There is some detailed information on greening our work with children and young people, together with some resources and some practical suggestions at the back of the book.

In summary we need to consider:

- Remember the principles of using recyclable and eco-friendly materials;
- Choose items of beauty and natural materials as far as possible;
- Make the space for meeting reflective of the seasons of the Church Year and nature;
- Ditch the glitter and remove plastics – these are particularly disastrous for the environment especially when made with a plastic core and polyester PET film;
- Consider your glue, crayons paints paper and tape – can you find more environmentally friendly alternatives?
- Encourage care of the learning environment;
- Go outdoors when possible;
- Consider what opportunities are offered to children and young people to encounter the natural

world in worship outdoors or to reflect on the issues involved in caring for creation as we travel through the year;

- Involve children and young people in consideration of the environment of the church and its grounds and in decisions about environmentally linked projects e.g Eco Church;
- Listen to the concerns and dreams of children and young people and find signs and stories of hope together.

Eco Congregation Scotland has procured an excellent set of questions for church leaders to answer including some about greening the church programmes and resources for work with children and young people. PDF file available here: <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Church-Check-Up.pdf>

Christian Environmental Link has produced a handy A5 leaflet which you can request by writing to CEL Resources, 40 The Avenue, Roundhay, Leeds LS8 1JG.



WORSHIP FOR EPIPHANY:

Holy Communion

This service of Holy Communion has a clear focus on creation and could be used at any time during the year. It includes a wonderful Creed written by Lisa Frenz:

Let us declare our faith in God.

We believe in God the Creator,
who created and is creating everything:

All **the universe, the world, the plants and animals, and us;
each of us, unique, individual and beloved of God.**

We believe in Jesus Christ,
who saved and is saving everything:

All **the universe, the world, the plants and animals, and us;
each of us, unique, individual and beloved of Christ.**

We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who guided and is guiding everything:

All **the universe, the world, the plants and animals, and us;
each of us, unique, individual and beloved of the Spirit.
Amen.**

'Creed' by Lisa Frenz. Reproduced with kind permission from the author.
Lisa's Liturgies, <https://sites.google.com/site/lisaliturgies/home>

The full print friendly liturgy can be accessed here:
<https://sites.google.com/view/chooselifecreation>

¹ Job 12:7-10

² Deuteronomy 30:19

³ Eleanor Morgan, “Oh wow! How getting more awe can improve your life – and even make you a better person,” Guardian online 23/09/22 <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/sep/23/how-getting-more-awe-can-improve-your-life-and-even-make-you-a-nicer-person>

⁴ Harriet Sherwood, “ Getting back to nature: how forest bathing can make us feel better,” Guardian online, 08/06/19 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jun/08/forest-bathing-japanese-practice-in-west-wellbeing>

⁵ The website of the International Year of Soils <https://www.fao.org/soils-2015/news-detail/en/c/280674>

Ordinary Time:

The power of everyday choices



Back into the ordinary

There are many weeks in the Church year that are labelled 'Ordinary Time' – what are they for? And does calling time simply 'ordinary' do an injustice to what might be going on in these (sometimes) long periods of time between festivals? We often use 'ordinary' to describe something that is just mediocre or even a bit dull but in the upside-down world of the gospel it is often the ordinary stuff of life that in God's hands can become something special. We come back again and again to ordinary time – a time of waiting



watching and looking; a time for nurturing the beginnings of growth; for renewing our trust and for rest and refreshment before setting out again with renewed energy. It is here and now where the growth is!

Time for growing

If you are lucky enough to have a garden or even a small patio or window box you will be familiar with the ritual of planting followed by long weeks of waiting. After the activity of doing what is needed for the seeds to flourish – preparing the ground, feeding the soil with fertiliser and digging in the compost – we are getting ready for new life to begin! For ages, it seems that nothing is happening. No movement in the soil. No sign of a leaf or twig. No sign of anything at all. Sometimes it is hard to be patient and to trust in the work of the nutrients in the soil, the activity of the sun and the rain and the passing of the time needed for anything to take root and grow. Eventually though, life begins to emerge, breaking through the surface, full of promise and hope. It is nature's extraordinary ordinary in action. We are called to have faith.

In spiritual terms, this is what the long weeks of Ordinary Time are for: to enable the word that we have heard in the past weeks to take root in our hearts and to bear fruit in changed lives. What might this mean in practice? Taking time to reconnect with the rhythms of



nature that we observe in the world around us; taking time to listen to God, taking time to pay attention to the rhythm of our own life and asking God to show us where change is needed. Not ordinary time then but rather God's time for extraordinary work to go on in the quiet spaces of our hearts and in the unseen planting of the seeds of God's love in our local places and in community relationships.

Teaching through the everyday

Jesus often taught by using images and objects from everyday life to illustrate the kingdom of God: seeds and ploughing; planting and harvesting; eating and drinking; buying and selling; invitations and parties; wineskins old and new; fishing nets and fields and, of course, bread and wine. It is through the ordinary fabric of

our lives that the thread of God's recreative purpose for us and for creation can be woven. In the kingdom of God, small things often matter the most.

Creation care also needs to be rooted in the everyday circumstances and contexts of life. This might be in small choices for change; in small commitments to waste less of the earth's resources; to reuse, repair and recycle' and in small steps towards sustainable living. Preachers and teachers in church communities should attend to the everyday dimensions of the faith of adults, children and young people. All of us need encouragement to make connections between the choices we make in our day to day living and the patterns and habits that can result in big changes and help us towards our goals of sustainable living.



Praying through the everyday

Celtic spirituality has long valued the encounter with God that comes to us through the ordinary things of life. Rather than the highs of feast or festival, ordinary time focuses our attention on the regular rhythms of prayer and service, on the ups and downs of our lives in the world and on the hallowing of time at the heart of our discipleship. It is perhaps time to pray the offices, focus on the Lord's Prayer regularly or to find a simple pattern and rhythm for our prayer. Celtic spirituality does not make a sharp division between what is sacred and what is secular – it is a fundamentally incarnational and sacramental spirituality in which our whole lives belong to God and where the ordinary is so often the very place where God does something extraordinary.

A similar strand of everyday spirituality can be found in very different traditions, for example in 24/7 prayer movement¹ and also in the idea of practising the presence of God.² Indeed, finding God in all things is at the core of Ignatian spirituality which helps us to connect with God everywhere, not only in church. Facing all the crises of our planet we need to seek the graces we need for the kind of everyday living that makes a difference to our local environments and to the world in which we live. Practising the Examen or another simple discipline of prayer can help as we

seek to know what our specific role might be as co-creators with God, transforming and treasuring the world he has placed us in. Some of us are called to be advocates; some are prophets or poets; some are teachers; some are healers; some are heralds of a world made new; some count the cost and find a way; some are encouragers. We need to nurture a variety of gifts in order to truly work together and, with God's help, to build a better world.

Learning through the everyday

The book of Deuteronomy tells us that 'The Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.'³ This takes us back to the idea of paying attention with our whole selves and immersing ourselves in the everyday beauty that we can find around us even in the most unlikely of places. In her poem, *Aurora Leigh*, the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire
with God:
But only he who sees takes off
his shoes
The rest sit round it and pick
blackberries.

This deep level of attention can inspire us to greater care for the world around us. What we choose to do in our everyday life matters for our spiritual journey



and ultimately for the health of the planet. Everyday decisions matter in God's good purposes for the Earth. The presence of God surrounds us on every side if we only have eyes to see. God's created order can speak to us of

God's glory and call us to new patterns of living. Ordinary Time invites us to join in with God's extraordinary ordinary work – if we will take a moment or two and practice the discipline of standing still and paying attention.

Prayer

Creator God

We give thanks for the extraordinary ordinary of the turning seasons: for the light from far flung stars; the sharp lemon sunlight that pierces winter's darkness and the promise of new life beneath the cold ground. In this season of our growth, send down your Spirit to warm our hearts again with the light of Christ; so that knowing ourselves to be loved into life by your extraordinary grace and called each one by name; we may be ready to carry the light of your transforming love into a waiting world.

Amen.

TO PONDER

How can we make time and space for encountering God through creation?



TAKE ONE

Bread and milk are two of the most ordinary and yet essential foodstuffs. How should we choose and treat these ordinary things and think about the cost of our choices for the environment?

Milk of human kindness?

This picture and the light that streams across the table, highlighting the importance of everyday objects and everyday food.



Take a moment to give thanks for the ordinary gifts that provide extraordinary blessings to us. How can we think about the day-to-day food we eat and its origins and make sure that we are fulfilling our call to protect the Earth and its peoples by choosing everyday things and everyday foodstuffs wisely?

Think about alternatives to dairy milk <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/28/what-plant-milk-should-i-drink-almond-killing-bees-aoe>

Daily bread: how can we limit our waste?

Bread is a staple food that is valued the world over. It is Approximately 24 million slices of bread are thrown away every day in the UK.⁴ According to research on food waste conducted by Wrap, if we could all waste fewer than three slices of bread a week the total amount of waste would be drastically reduced.⁵

Bread is also the fruit of our labours and the work of human hands. It is an extraordinary ordinary activity familiar throughout history and linked to the ability of people to survive



and to thrive. Making our own bread gives us a fundamental connection with the faith, effort, waiting and satisfaction involved in any creative activity. It reminds us what it means to

be collaborators with nature's processes and reminds us to respect the work of human hands. It also reminds us to respect and not to waste the ordinary things in life that have an essential value.

WORSHIP – A Bible Study

Psalm 148

Look up Psalm 148 and read it slowly, once or twice.

Worshipping with all creation

Rev Prof Jeremy Begbie, Duke University⁶




I write this as the UK is just starting to emerge from the Covid-19 lockdown. Many have told me how in the last few months they have begun to see and hear things they never noticed before. The bird chorale at 5 in the morning, the rippled bark on that beech tree at the bottom of the road, Kermit-green nettles swaying in the wind, bees hovering over wildflowers. As the roar of the roads retreats, and life's pace slows (at least for some of us), we have re-discovered the world around us.

A wise writer said, 'Our lives are made from the things we pay attention to. Psalm 148 pictures things we've seen a hundred times before (apart from angels, perhaps!). Sun, moon, stars, fire, snow, frost – all very familiar. But the psalmist makes us look – not merely see, but look, attend, pay attention to what they're doing.

They all praise God. All creatures – notice how the word "all" keeps appearing – the totality of things in the heavens (1-4) and on earth (7-12). They all praise the Creator.

How? Simply by doing their own thing in their own way. Take "fruit trees" (9). A fruit tree praises God by being itself, doing what fruit trees do best – growing, flowering, producing fruit. And the same applies to mountains and hills, creeping things and birds – the whole teeming lot. Every day we are surrounded by a vast, uncontainable, ceaseless hymn of praise, each creature glorying God in its own way. And this is going on whether we see it, hear it, notice it, acknowledge it or not.

Why does the Psalmist want us to notice this cosmic praise? Above all, because we're reminded who is at the centre of things. It's perilously easy to think creation needs us to praise God, like the vicar who can't believe his people can worship God without him. Here humans are not centre stage. They're only mentioned in the last three verses (11-14). Yes, you and I have a unique role in God's world – we can know we are loved by God, and can magnify and extend the praise of creation – through farming, industry, art and music. But we




are not the pivot around which all else revolves. God is the one to be worshipped, and the cat in your sitting room and the robin at the bottom of the garden are quite able to praise God without us.

Just because God is at the centre, then, creation gives us a model of praise. Notice the Psalmist invites creation to praise God: “let them praise....!” That might seem a little odd, but it’s a fitting image: the Psalmist is assembling ‘the cosmic choir’ (Richard Bauckham) and telling it to sing so we can learn from it. What does it mean to be a human being praising God? It means doing what we were created to do, not trying to be God. Like the fruit tree, even the wild animals

and the cattle (10), we will never be more fully ourselves than when everything resonates with the Composer and speaks of him. Praise is more than a song, it’s a way of life.

What this Psalm doesn’t give us is any hint of what’s gone wrong. There’s no mention of nature’s cruelty, no destructive disease, no Coronavirus. But this is where the New Testament takes us behind the scenes. There we learn that energising and directing this unstoppable praise is Jesus Christ, the one by whom, through whom, and by whom all things were made. We learn that the cosmic praise has turned sour, dissonant with evil. And we learn that





the conductor of our praise has come to this world to take on that dissonance, to re-tune us back to God. Through him, a new music is now possible, richer than ever before, a symphony we can start to play now, but will only know beyond death.

“Our lives are made from the things we pay attention to.”
Yes, pay attention with the Psalmist to creation’s praise, but do that by paying attention to the One at the heart of it all. Then our lives will indeed be made – in fact, re-made.

For Reflection:

Look around you at the cosmic orchestra of creation.

1. When did you last acknowledge the praise of creation?
2. Why do we often fail to notice creation’s praise?
3. How does, for example, a hill praise God?
4. What does it mean to lead lives of praise?
5. In light of all this, what is the writer to the Hebrews telling us when he puts the words of Psalm 22 on Jesus’ lips: ‘In the midst of the congregation I will praise you’?
6. How can you join creation in its praise of the Creator here and now?

¹ 24/7 Prayer is a movement that was founded by Pete Greig in the UK and has been described as ‘a non-stop global prayer meeting, a new monasticism for the 21st century’.

² This is a spiritual practice associated with Brother Lawrence a 17th Century Carmelite monk. The practice encourages us to reflect on God’s presence with us whatever we are doing and wherever we are.

³ Deuteronomy 4:39

⁴ Samuel Webb “Critical Roll: Is bread bad for the environment?” Article from The Independent 30/12/21 <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/infact/bread-consumption-climate-change-crisis-b1984378.html> Accessed 22/09/22

⁵ WRAP Household food and drink waste in the UK 2012 <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/report/household-food-and-drink-waste-united-kingdom-2012> Accessed 22/09/22

⁶ Reproduced with permission from the author and Resound Worship. *Doxecology Study Guide* © Resound Worship, www.resoundworship.org.

⁶ Hebrews 2:12



Lent:
Choosing life

Down to basics

This is a season of essentials: of travelling with only what we need; and of making sure that we can survive. It is a pilgrimage through a desert land where there is no water; a pathway across stones and thistles in a dusty landscape; a journey into the darkness, internal and external. We need strength for this journey – not the superficial strength of a chocolate fix but the deep and lasting food that only God can give and the water of life that our thirsty hearts cry out for in the desert emptiness. As Godly Play puts it: ‘The desert is a dangerous place. People do not go into the desert unless they have to. And yet...so many wonderful and important things happen in the desert, we need to know what it is like.’¹ In Godly Play practice, as in life, we have to go into the desert often as we travel together and seek the word of God for us in this place.

Preparing the ground

Lent happens at the time of the year when Spring is on its way, but has not yet arrived. There are still too many hours of darkness; the trees are still skeletal and gardens and public spaces empty of growth. At this point in our journey through the year, we embrace the austerities of Lent. This time of year is for tasks that will enable future growth – in

our own lives and in the world around us. Protecting, preparing and enriching soil and removing weeds are all important tasks at this time. That is true both of the physical soil in which we want life to grow and of the metaphorical soil of our own hearts. Beginning with the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, our attention is drawn to the stripped back places where the secrets of our hearts are laid bare and we can begin to see the motivations of the human heart that lead to so much destruction in our world. We can also begin to see what changes need to be made to the way we live, so that life can flourish.

Places of death and the water of life

The Lectionary readings set for Lent 1 Year A, take us back to the beginning² and to the story of the Temptation in the Wilderness. We then follow the stories of Abraham and of Nicodemus; the water from the rock and the well at Sychar in Samaria; the anointing of David and the healing of the blind man; Psalm 23; the valley of the dry bones and the raising of Lazarus, followed by Palm Sunday. Many of these stories evoke contrast between death and life. Some of this is metaphorical, picture language that evokes ideas about hardness of heart and the effects of human sin on relationships and in our world. Some of it is

however literal – desert and places of death; dry bones in a valley and the longing for new life. There are plenty of places like this all around us in the world; in our neighbourhoods, and within our own lives.

Creation is longing for life-giving water. Many places on our planet are suffering drought and soil erosion. Other parts of the globe are experiencing die-back of vegetation. Some areas of the planet have lost the ability to support the growth of crops upon which people depend for survival. Food security is a real and pressing challenge for many people across the globe. Times of heatwave followed by drought are becoming increasingly common across the globe as our weather patterns are disrupted. In a penitential season, we might make time to recognise the part we have played in the planet's distress and the choices that we have made that lead to death instead of and life.

Remembering the covenant

Today we do not speak very much about the concept of covenant but in the biblical narrative covenants are central to the story of God's redemptive plan for all of creation, in partnership with humans. In Year B of the Lectionary, the first Sunday of Lent reminds us of sign of the covenant in the story of Noah:



I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.³

After Adam and Eve leave the Garden of Eden, the narrative takes a darker turn up to the point where we reach the story of Noah and chaos has enveloped the entire world. Post flood, the

covenant that God makes with humanity includes the promise never to destroy the earth by flood again and to invite humans and animals to be partners in the recreation of the world. The story is very particular about the nature of this covenant: it is between God and the whole earth and it is an everlasting covenant. Covenants are about God in relationship with human beings. They ask us, as stewards of God's gifts, to reflect on our own covenants with the earth and the choices we make between life and death.

God's plan for restoration runs through four further covenants with Abraham, Moses, David

and the anticipation of a New Covenant that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He comes to renew the covenant with the people of God and with the earth. The God that we discover here is a covenant maker and a covenant keeper. When Jesus proclaims the blood of the new covenant at the Last Supper, he is drawing on the theme of covenant that runs through the Old Testament, particularly the Sinai covenant with Moses and the promises in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which foresee the law written on the hearts of the people of God. God is creating a new people who will live differently and will live into





the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey.⁴ There is however a choice offered to us: the way of faithfulness or of unfaithfulness to the covenant. This becomes clear as the people of God are about to enter the land that they were promised.

A covenant community?

The blood of the new covenant in Jesus offers a way of restoring the broken covenants between humans and God and humans and the Earth, as described in Genesis 3. The Church, as God's covenant community, has a missional challenge to reinterpret the meaning of the covenant in today's world. Our relationship with the Earth is an important aspect of our spirituality and discipleship.

Belief in a new creation should inform our responsibilities for life in the here and now, where we are to usher in the new creation and to heal the damage that our choices and actions have brought about in the world. We can see then that the garden at the end of time, when all things are restored, stands as a reminder of the covenant promises. The sober and demanding nature of being a covenant community is described by Howard Jacobson in a reflection for BBC Sounds: 'When Jewish people speak of being chosen they are not asserting spiritual superiority. The covenant God made with them demanded a renunciation of frivolity and self-assertion in favour of the pursuit of ethical purpose'.⁵

Ethical purpose includes unfashionable qualities of obedience, service and fidelity to promises – qualities that are very far removed from the values of celebrity culture, politics and the media. However, this way of

living is a touchstone for our life in community and for the covenants we make with the earth and all its creatures in order to participate in and work towards the new creation.

Prayer

God of life

We see your tender care for every living thing and the beauty and variety with which you surround us in the world.

We know that you create us to live in relationship:

with you and with the earth that you have made, and yet we live in ways that are damaging and destructive.

You set before us a choice and you ask us to choose life.

At every turning of the way
help us to choose what is good;
help us to speak what is true;
help us to be good stewards of the earth
so that your new creation
can begin where we are.

Amen.

TO PONDER

What does God's covenant with every living creature mean for our creation care today?



TAKE ONE

Act justly; love mercy; walk humbly: Creation care and developing a Rhythm of Life

Consider developing a Rhythm of Life that includes creation care commitments. This can be reflected on with people of any age with the explanation adapted accordingly. There is an example below.

Talk together about what it means to follow Jesus and what supports you in day to day discipleship at home, at work and at school. Explore ways of engaging with action to protect the environment and learning more about God's world and its creatures. You could explore ways of embedding a rhythm of life in households and families working out how to live a more balanced life in order to save resources and protect the planet. Work on a Rhythm of Life and the things that sustain us in caring for creation could be part of confirmation preparation.

What is a Rhythm of Life?

It isn't a set of external rules that you have to follow. It is set of priorities and practices that any follower of Jesus Christ tries

to live by. These priorities and practices may change over time as we continue to reflect on God's call to us. Sometimes it can be helpful to explore this with a Spiritual Guide, who can help us to discern the movement of God in our lives. Young people can make this a regular feature of their discussion and reflection.

A Rhythm of Life has emerged from what was called a Rule of Life. The Desert Fathers, a group of mystics living in Egypt around the third century AD, developed what is thought to be the first Rule of Life. The Rule of St Benedict, written in about 530AD is the most well-known Rule of Life. It was created to support monks in putting their faith into practice in shared life and through spiritual practices and offers 'a plan for living a balanced, simple and prayerful life.'⁶

Writing about the rule of St Benedict for everyday living today, Joan Chittister wrote: 'the spirituality that emerges from the Rule of Benedict is a spirituality charged with living the ordinary life extraordinarily well.'⁷ Our everyday small choices matter. As new shapes of church emerge,

members of neo-monastic communities have developed frameworks for prayer, reading the bible and engaging in living out their faith in the world and in community.

Who can join in?

All of us – young and old; family groups and Christian communities everywhere. We don't have to be monks or nuns! A Rhythm of Life can help us to focus on everyday faith and ways of being more intentional in our care of the planet and finding time to connect with God through nature.

A Rhythm of Life with creation care at its heart?

God asks us to be good stewards of creation. We might therefore want to reflect on how to incorporate creation care commitments into our rhythm of life and find ways of being accountable to others for the joys and challenges we experience as we seek to keep these commitments.

What kind of practices could support our creation care?

It is important that we consider how to live in counter-cultural and sustainable ways, with a Rhythm of Life that helps us to live in balance.



(a) **Find rest:** Counter-cultural Sabbath

Taking time out to recharge, rest and pray is an essential part of living a balanced Christian life. Practising sabbath is also a way for us to step outside of the drive for 24/7 consumption and to reflect on the choices that we make day to day. We might make a commitment to switch off our phone and get out into nature regularly to connect with God.

(b) **Live gently:** Simplicity

We might think about how to develop ways of living more sustainably. Each one of us can make small changes that add up to a more holistic and a more holy way of living. Practices of reducing, repairing, reusing and recycling can help us to become more aware of the impact that our choices have on earth's finite resources.

(c) **Love mercy:** Hospitality

We so often think of hospitality as an act of welcome towards other human beings but we could also consider what we can do to make room and space for all of the living creatures that we encounter.

(d) **Act justly:** Sharing resources and challenging injustice

Engage with local need and be involved in actions that support a more just world. For some people this might involve

challenging the structures that have led to injustice by participating in campaigning groups or local projects.

(e) **Walk humbly:** Practising generous living

Rooted in scripture, generous living recognises that everything we have comes from God. It is also about reflecting God's generosity to us in the gift of creation. We might consider ways of pooling material resources and reflect on how to live well with less.

The charity Green Christian also offers a Way of Life Community focused on creation care. The 'companions' of the community embrace disciplines of Daily prayer and devotions, Living gently on the earth, Public witness, and Shared encouragement. To find out more, visit their website: <https://greenchristian.org.uk/way/>.

TAKE FIVE



1. CONNECT

Run a Lent Course; screen a movie

Organise a film evening in your parish possibly with a discussion afterwards. Choose a film with an environmental theme. Here are some suggestions:

In 2021, three-quarters (75%) of adults in Great Britain said they were worried about the impact of climate change, according to the [Office for National Statistics' Opinions and Lifestyle Survey](#). Young people in particular are frightened about what the future might hold. A 2021 Bath University survey of 10,000 people aged between 16 and 25 across 10 countries showed that over half (56%) thought humanity is doomed.

This makes us wonder – what is the Good News? What does the Bible say about creation care? How do we live as Christians in a time of climate crisis? Is there any hope for humanity? Big questions, that are best explored in conversation with others. Lent is an opportune time to hold a series of small group meetings – or to screen a topical movie – to help and challenge people to make a difference.

What courses and movies are available?

A comprehensive list of courses is found in the Resources section. Below are some suggestions for appropriate movies and documentaries.

Climate Change – The Facts (2019) is an hour-long British documentary presented by David Attenborough that discusses climate change and possible solutions to counteract it. It is available on BBC iPlayer and other streaming services.

David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet (2020) is David Attenborough's "witness statement" of how the natural world has been affected during his own lifetime, and what could happen in the future if no action is taken.

Don't Look Up (2021) is an apocalyptic comedy which tells the story of two astronomers attempting to warn humanity about an approaching comet that will destroy human civilisation. The impact event is an allegory for climate change, and the film is a satire of government, political, celebrity, and media indifference to the climate crisis.

Princess Mononoke (1997) may have been released in the previous century, but it is even more relevant today. Produced by the famous Japanese animation studio Ghibli, it is a fable about the consequences of destroying

nature and human's inability to live in harmony. Suitable for older children and adults.

How to run a course

Please note that, due to copyright, movies should not be screened publically. However, a movie may be shown in the non-commercial, private, and educational setting of a 'home group'.

Screenings should be followed by plenty of time for reflection.

It is important to create a non-judgemental context in which people can grow in their commitment to creation care. We each fall short, and we all are directly or indirectly part of the problem. However, our hope is in Jesus Christ, who invites us to join his mission to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Talking is important, but if our reflections don't lead to concrete action, however small, we are missing the point. There is a direct correlation between 'hope' and 'action'.

Suggestions for a short prayer liturgy are available in the Lent worship section.

2. CONTEMPLATE

The Stations of the Cross and the Suffering of Creation



The Stations of the Cross offer a powerful reflection on the suffering of Jesus. Our own suffering, and the suffering of all creation, is united with Christ's suffering on the cross. In his suffering, the suffering of all creation is made visible. The following Stations of the Cross and the Suffering of Creation can be done as an intergenerational reflection or used in children's groups or youth groups.

- 1. Jesus is condemned to death**
Find an image of a farmer on his barren soil. Reflect on condemned lives and lost livelihoods.
- 2. Jesus takes up his Cross**
Find an image of a sea creature entangled in plastic. Reflect on pollution.
- 3. Jesus falls for the first time**
Find an image of a falling tree. Reflect on deforestation.
- 4. Jesus meets his Mother**
Find an image of a broken flower. Reflect on our broken relationship with Mother Earth.
- 5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the Cross**
Find an image of a wildlife protection worker. Reflect on nature conservation work.

6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Find an image of bird being cleaned of oil. Reflect on animal rescuers.

7. Jesus falls for the second time

Find an image of collapsing ice shelf. Reflect on rising temperatures and sea levels.

8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

Find an image of female refugees. Reflect on climate displacement.

9. Jesus falls for the third time

Find an image of dying vegetation and fallen leaves. Reflect on droughts and exhausted soils.

10. Jesus is stripped of his garments

Find an image of a burned landscape. Reflect on the increase in wildfires.

11. Jesus is nailed to the Cross

Find an image of bird caught on a glue stick or in a trap. Reflect on animal cruelty.

12. Jesus dies on the Cross

Find an image of a garbage heap. Jesus is about to descend into hell (Gehenna). Gehenna was the garbage heap outside Jerusalem. Reflect on the way we dispose of things.

13. Jesus is taken down from the Cross

Find an image of a small basket of harvested fruits under a tree. Reflect on how Jesus' sacrifice is bearing fruit, as his body is taken off the tree.

14. Jesus is laid in the tomb

Find an image of a seed planted in fresh soil. Reflect on the promise of new life.



3. CREATE

Confession station

You will need a large bowl of water and enough smallish pebbles for each person present to have one. This act of confession uses a litany – a frequently used pattern of penitential prayer in Lent.



From the greed that blinds us to what is enough:

Good Lord, deliver us.

From assuming that we are more important than all the other creatures on the planet:

Good Lord, deliver us.

From ceaseless consumption that comes with high cost to the earth:

Good Lord, deliver us.

From wasting the earth's resources:

Good Lord, deliver us.

From putting off what we can change and we can do until another day:

Good Lord, deliver us.

From closing our eyes to the urgency of the climate crisis:

Good Lord, deliver us.

From closing our ears to the warnings of science:

Good Lord, deliver us.

From ignoring your promptings to tend and treasure your gift of the Earth:

Good Lord, deliver us.

From all our damaging behaviours and choices:

Good Lord, deliver us.

Invite the congregation to drop their stones in the water as their own act of confession.

Say together:

Good Lord, deliver us and lead us in your ways. Amen

4. REFLECT

40 days with God's creatures



We think of our nation as a nation of animal lovers, but our behaviour towards animals often tells a different story. Our food production can be exploitative and in the quest for cheaper produce, the welfare of animals can be low on the list of priorities. In Genesis 2, we read that 'the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.'⁸ Naming the animals, rather than a display of power over them, is intended to be an act of relationship. Names make things distinctive and individual. Names suggest that there is a connection that cannot be summed up by referring to the animals by numbers or just 'thing'. When we know an animal or bird by name we have made a connection to it and it has a place in our mind and heart.

Even though animals feature repeatedly in the bible, we do not often hear teaching about our

relationship to animals and our responsibility to care for all of God's creatures. Sarx, a charity set up to help Christians to engage theologically with animals and animal issues, has produced a set of Lent resources that focus on care for God's creatures. '40 days with God's Creatures' <https://sarx.org.uk/latest-news/40daysguide/> takes a different theme for each week of Lent and offers daily resources which are available as a downloadable app and viewable on web browsers. The materials help Christians to see animals through the eyes of faith and to better understand the good news for all creation – animals included!

Animal blessing

If you think pets are a modern invention, you are mistaken. Dogs have been companions of humans for well over 10,000 years. The Egyptians began domesticating cats as early as 3500 BC. Ancient Romans kept birds. Even the Bible provides some early evidence of the close relationship between humans and animals. The second book of Samuel records the reign of King David (ca. 1000 BC) and tells the story of a 'poor man who had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.' (2 Samuel 12:3)

Sometimes the word 'pet' doesn't quite capture it. 'Companion

animal' might be a better term. You own a pet. But you live with a companion animal.

The therapeutic benefits of living with animals are well-known. People often describe a feeling of unconditional love and loyalty. Companion animals can decrease stress and improve both mental and physical health, and they are known to help children with their emotional and social skills.

In the Christian tradition there have been several saints who built relationship with wild animals too. There are some beautiful stories of St Francis and the wolf of Gubbio, St Kevin and the Blackbird, and of course, St Cuthbert and the otters and Eider ducks of the Farne Islands (they still call them Cuddy ducks in Northumberland). Whether these stories are historically accurate or not is beside the point. These myths help us to express our deep longing for peace and harmony between all creatures – a vision which is found in the Bible too.

It should come as no surprise that Services of Blessing for Animals and Pets prove popular. In the worship section for Lent you will find a Thanksgiving for Animals for Palm Sunday – donkeys are optional.

5. RESPOND

Costly food

Consider organising the sharing and distribution of basic



food amongst your church members. At times when the costs of food are rising this can save everyone money and limit the carbon footprint because of reducing the number of supermarket deliveries. Some churches have organised food banks that volunteers run, meeting local need by the sharing of material resources.

The United Nations has referred to food, energy and water as the nexus of sustainable development. Rising populations have increased the demand for all three and food sits at the heart of tackling climate change. Food production currently accounts for over a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions and half of the world's habitable land is used for agriculture. 70% of the world's freshwater withdrawals are for agriculture and 78% of the pollution of waterways is caused by agriculture.⁹

The source of the emissions varies for different products but transport is often part of the emissions calculation. Greenhouse gas emissions are higher for meat based products and lower for plant based. One example: producing a kilogram of beef emits 60 kilograms of greenhouse gases whereas one kilogram of peas emits 1 kilogram of greenhouse gases. Meat is known to be a major contributor to greenhouse gases in change of use of land, in production phases and in transportation. Why not limit meat consumption by considering going

red meat and dairy free one day a week?

Consider the journey that your food makes and explore the issues that make some food costly for the environment. Your bananas have probably travelled a staggering 4,600 miles but may have travelled by boat which involves fewer emissions than plane travel.

This useful guide from the Royal Society of Biology can be used in intergenerational groups https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/pdf/Geography_lesson_presentation.pdf and here is a detailed explanation of the impact of our food on the planet

<https://foodprint.org/the-total-footprint-of-our-food-system/issues/food-and-the-environment/> It is often hard to work out the air miles that your produce has travelled as this information is not given on the labelling. However, country of origin usually is on the label. You might be shocked if you looked at this closely with an atlas in mind. You might then want to consider not buying air freighted food as far as possible. What more can we do? Avoid plastic packaging; choose locally produced food; limit waste; eat vegetables that are in season avoiding ones that have travelled the globe; enjoy some wonky veg! You can sign up with national organic delivery companies such as Riverford or Abel and Cole, and with Wonky veg in Midlands regions <https://wonkyvegboxes.co.uk> or Oddbox <https://www.oddbox.co.uk/why>

Lent Group Prayers

PRAYERS AT THE START OF THE MEETING:

Keep a moment of silence, to acknowledge the past day/week. Thank God for the different paths that led people to the place where you are gathered now. Pray for the conversations about to take place. Pray for a deepening of our love for creation, for one another, and for our Creator.

After another moment of silence, you may wish to say this prayer:

All creation worships you, O God,
and we your people bless you
for the beauty of the earth.
We thank you for making a good
world in the beginning,
and for making it better by the Word made flesh,
whose death and resurrection in the body reveal
the promised recreation of the universe.
May your kingdom come on earth
as your will is done in heaven
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

PRAYERS AT THE END OF THE MEETING:


Acknowledge that some of the topics you have discussed may have a deep emotional impact. It is not unusual to feel sadness, guilt, despair and anxiety in the face of the climate crisis. There is no better response to these feelings than to bring them to God in prayer, while being reminded of the Creator's never-ending love and care for his creation.

As part of your prayer time, you may wish to use this prayer:

Creator God,
In this time of abstinence and reflection,
help us to confront our weaknesses in the wilderness
and to play our part in your great universe.
We give thanks for the green shoots of your presence
in the waste places of the world.
May we learn new habits of holy living
in our relationship with the earth.

All **Amen.**

Prayers taken from 'Praying for the Earth' by Rob Kelsey available from Sacristy Press (www.sacristy.co.uk)



If your group meets in the evening, it may be most appropriate to end with a liturgy of 'Night Prayer'.

Common Worship 'A Time for Creation' contains both Midday and Night Prayer liturgies, with appropriate creation-themed psalms and short Scripture readings, including Joseph Addison's (1672-1719) poem 'The Spacious Firmament on High', which may be sung to the tune of 'Before the Ending of the Day'.

The Spacious Firmament on high,
With all the blue Ethereal Sky,
And spangled Heav'ns, a Shining Frame,
Their great Original proclaim:
Th' unwearied Sun, from day to day,
Does his Creator's Pow'r display,
And publishes to every Land
The Work of an Almighty Hand.

Soon as the Evening Shades prevail,
The Moon takes up the wondrous Tale,
And nightly to the list'ning Earth
Repeats the Story of her Birth:
Whilst all the Stars that round her burn,
And all the Planets, in their turn,
Confirm the Tidings as they rowl,
And spread the Truth from Pole to Pole.

What though, in solemn Silence, all
Move round the dark terrestrial Ball?
What tho' nor real Voice nor Sound
Amid their radiant Orbs be found?
In Reason's Ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious Voice,
For ever singing, as they shine,
The Hand that made us is Divine.

A song of lament and hope in the valley of dry bones

This text can be used as a dramatic reading on the fifth Sunday of Lent in Year A; on the Day of Pentecost Year B or on any other suitable occasion.

**Reader 1: God, our God,
we cry to you.
We lift our voices on the dry desert wind,
in the blistering heat that scorches.
As the sand whips across our faces
we cry to you.
Come and save us, O God.**


Reader 2: This is a desolate land, O God.
It is a land of broken dreams;
a wasteland of false pride;
a place where there is no hope
and the old certainties are destroyed.

Reader 3: Can what is broken be restored?
O Lord, only you know,
Only you can mend and restore.

Reader 2: These bones are lost;
they cannot live again.
Species extinct;
soil irretrievably damaged;
this land is dead.
Water courses are stopped
nothing grows or moves;
the ground is parched and thirsty,
human and animal bodies lie bereft of all life.

Reader 3: Can what is dead live again?
O Lord, only you know.
Only you can refresh and renew
bringing water out of the rock and dust;
life out of death.

Reader 2: The city is a ruin
the people have fled.
Soaring structures have crumbled into dust
the mighty metropolis is silent;
the plough is still and the ground is sterile.



Reader 3: Can your people flourish again?
in the land where each person lives
in harmony with the earth?
O Lord, only you know.


Can we plant and grow;
and share and cherish all life on Earth?
O Lord, only you know
only you can bring us back to our senses
back to our home,
back to you.

**Reader 1: God, our God,
we cry to you.
We lift our voices on the dry desert wind
in the blistering heat that scorches
as the sand whips across our faces
we cry to you.
Come and save us, O God.**

Reader 4: Come, Spirit of God
mighty and tender;
breathe on us on your power;
breathe on us in your love;
breathe on us in our emptiness.
For only you can bring life out of death;
raise blossoming plants in the desert waste
and awaken hope where there is despair.
You set our feet in the valley of bones
You ask us to look and see what you will bring about.

**Reader 1: God, our God,
we cry to you.
We lift our voices in hope
in the midst of places of emptiness
where all seems lost
we cry to you.
Come and save us, O God**

Reader 3: Breathe on us in your tenderness;
breathe on us in our longing;
breathe on us in your power.
Breathe on the wasted opportunities and the lost causes;
breathe on our hopelessness;
breathe on our broken dreams.



Speak to us of life renewed;
speak to us of a world made whole;
speak to us of possibility and the winds of change.

Reader 4: Our planet cries out for healing.

In the valley of bones:
Restore what has been lost;
renew the fabric of creation;
repair the damage we have done.

Lift us up again from the dust of the earth
and teach us to live once more by your Spirit's grace
that we may choose what leads to life;
tend the wounds that we have caused
and walk in peace on the Earth.

**Reader 1: God, our God,
we cry to you,
we lift our voices in hope.
In the midst of empty and desolate places
where all seems lost
we cry to you
Come and save us, O God
Amen**



WORSHIP FOR LENT:

Thanksgiving for Animals

This service could be held on Palm Sunday (donkeys!) or, with some adaptations, on any Sunday throughout the year. It concludes with this blessing for companion animals:

Almighty and everlasting God,
Creator of all things and giver of all life,
let your blessing rest upon these animals.
May our relationships with them mirror your love,
and our care for them be an example of your bountiful mercy.
Grant the animals health and peace.
Strengthen us to love and care for them as we strive to
imitate the love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

The minister asks the name of the animal, and blesses the animal:

[insert name], you were created by God,
and you are loved by God.
May you and your human family
experience joy and companionship together,
and continue to be a blessing to each other.

All **Amen.**

The full print friendly liturgy can be accessed here:
<https://sites.google.com/view/chooselifecreation>

¹ Jerome W Berryman, "The Great Family: Godly Play Sacred Stories The Complete Guide to Godly Play Volume 2," (New York: Church Publishing inc.), 2017.

² Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

³ Genesis 9:13-15

⁴ Exodus 19:4-6

⁵ Howard Jacobson "Reflections on Majesty," BBC Sounds 22 September 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p09mdphx> Accessed on 23/08/22

⁶ The Friends of St Benedict "The Rule of St Benedict", <http://www.benedictfriend.org/the-rule.html> Accessed 07/10/22

⁷ Joan Chittister, "Wisdom distilled from the daily: Living the rule of St Benedict today," San Francisco CA: Harper, 1990, 6

⁸ Genesis 2:19

⁹ Source: Our World in Data <https://ourworldindata.org/environmental-impacts-of-food> Accessed 10/10/22

Easter:

Hope in the garden



Walking with God in the garden

Gardens, and the sensory imagery associated with them, punctuate the biblical narrative, offering us insight into God's vision for human flourishing and for the restoration of all things. In the beginning... there was a garden. In the account of creation given in Genesis 1, we are told that 'the Earth brought forth vegetation; plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it'. The account in Genesis 2 describes how: 'The Lord God planted a garden in Eden'. The garden described here represents the idea of wholeness, where humans, together with God, tend and care for the created order. It is a place of beauty and shelter; protection and sustenance. The garden is the place where humans meet with God, talk with God and walk with God. The close relationship that humans enjoyed with God and within the creation is, as we know, shattered by human choice and action, and Adam and Eve have to leave the garden in which they had been at home and are sent out into the world.

As a sign of restored hope and life, the people of God are told to 'build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce'. In Amos 9, it is to a garden that the exiled return: 'They

will plant vineyards and gardens; they will eat their crops and drink their wine.' In fact, it is the rich abundance of growing things that represents the restoration of God's people in the Old Testament. The promised land was God's intention for the people – a place where they could live in security and peace and where they could put down roots and flourish: 'For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey'. What can we learn from the rich imagery of gardens at key points within the Biblical narrative?

The garden of resurrection

After the crucifixion, John's Gospel tells us that: 'Near the place where Jesus was crucified was a garden, and in the garden there was a new tomb where no one had yet been laid to rest. And because the Sabbath was approaching, and the tomb was nearby, that's where they laid the body of Jesus'. It is here that the good news of the resurrection is announced to Mary. It is striking that the first encounter with the risen Lord is in a garden. In fact, Jesus is mistaken for the gardener! In the Song of Solomon, the garden is the place of life and flourishing:

I went down to the grove of walnut trees and out to the valley to see the new spring growth, to see whether the grapevines had budded or the pomegranates were in bloom.

At the end of time, there will be 'a new heaven and a new earth' with a flourishing tree of life at its heart, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations.

Easter Gardens and Easter Crosses

We are by now familiar with the idea of creating an Easter Garden as a focus for worship at Easter. This can be a great intergenerational activity in both the planning and the making stages. Easter Gardens have not acquired the same popularity as nativity scenes,

possibly because in many cultures the Easter story is less well known. Some churches have developed a tradition of refashioning branches from the Christmas tree into a Lenten tree and then an Easter Cross. This is a great way of recycling a Christmas tree but it is also a way of making a coherent whole from the stories of the child in the manger and the man on the cross.

Quiet Gardens

This seems a good moment to consider the solace that gardens bring to our souls and the rest, peace and relaxation that they offer. The Quiet Garden Movement which has a network of listed gardens across the UK that can be visited, encourages us all to take time out from our 24/7 online lives in order to find peace and



restoration in garden settings. The Founder of the Quiet Garden Movement, Philip Roderick, said this:

'We live in a world where we are swamped by methods of communication and yet we find ourselves unable to communicate. Silence is the missing and vital ingredient. Even as little as five minutes can be restorative and healing.'

Planning and creating a quiet garden is a valuable exercise in intergenerational work and in theological and personal reflection. What makes us feel safe and relaxed? What kind of plants would we want to include that can provide privacy or beauty or which, by their movement, establish a feeling of calm? What memories can we share of times

we have felt close to God in a garden? How can we make a safe place that serves the needs of our communities? What aspects of God's creation do you most want to reflect and how can the space demonstrate this?

The Quiet Garden Movement has established core values of hospitality, contemplation, connection to nature and creativity that underpin the work they do and the way that they encourage community groups to think about the spaces they want to create. These values are helpful to any group beginning to consider making a quiet garden of their own. The journey from darkness to light or from Lenten abstinence to resurrection abundance can also help in finding ideas to work with.



Sensory gardens

Another approach is to work on ideas for a sensory garden. These spaces consider textures, sounds and scents of plants and other tactile objects to offer a rich environment for exploration and encounter. Some ideas are closely linked to the idea of a healing garden. The Royal Horticultural Society offers advice and suggestions for planning and planting this kind of space. In some schools, sensory gardens have been terrific learning environments, offering safe and calming spaces in which to encounter nature.

Gardens have the power to inspire us to calm us and to transform us. The whole world in one sense is a



creative, sensory space which we can explore and cherish or destroy and ruin. 'If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden.' And the responsibility for tending it is ours in partnership with God's creative Spirit, in this in between space between the garden of Eden and the garden at the end of time.

Prayer

God of life and hope, we offer you all that we are
and we place our lives in your hands.

In Jesus you meet us at every turning of the road;
you call our name in the garden;
and you challenge us at the margins.

As we are greeted between the life we know and the new future to
which you call us, we hear your voice, asking us to change.

You call us to be witnesses to a world made new.

Give us courage to respond with our whole hearts,
and walk with you into your promised new day.

Amen.

TO PONDER

**Have you had an experience of being close to
God in a garden?**

Eastertide

Rogation Sunday (the Sixth Sunday of Eastertide)

Rogation days were originally held between the Monday and Wednesday before Ascension day, as a time of fasting and prayer. They were accompanied by a procession around the parish boundary sometimes referred to as 'Beating the Bounds'. This is a time to rediscover our parish and deepen our roots in our immediate neighbourhoods and in the places where we live and work. Where you live and where you are part of a wider community forms the soil that is the place where the kingdom of God can take root and flourish.

The observance of Rogation days is very much a lost tradition. But their original purpose as a time to pray for God's protection over the land, the fields and the soil in the fields still has resonance for us today. It is a time to ask for blessing on the good earth that God has given us and to ask God to bless all that grows in the soil and produces crops for food and the hands of the farmers who produce what we eat. We are being reminded of our dependence on God and in a culture where we are so often distanced from the way that our food is produced. Too often, we are unaware of the journey that our vegetables, meat and milk

have undergone before they arrive on our tables. It is a good time for congregations to reflect on what they eat and to acknowledge what has gone into the production and distribution of our food.

The poet and priest George Herbert outlined the following four aims for Rogationtide:

- To seek God's blessing
- To seek the preservation of justice and peace in the boundaries of the parish
- To walk in love with on another
- To practice mercy and generosity

Scripture teaches us that Creation itself cries out for redemption and we are called to work towards the day when creation is freed from all that destroys and harms. Our worship on Rogation Sunday is a time for us to recommit to playing our full part in the preservation of creation.

At the end of the service, the priest may bless seeds or plants asking for God's blessing and for the recognition of our trust and dependence. It is a time for getting our hands dirty – by committing to care for the soil and to reconnect with the earth that God has given us.

Prayer

God of our growth
send our roots down deep
into the rich good soil of your word.
Send our roots down deep into our communities
Into acts of service to our neighbour and to our planet
Send our roots down deep
into your vision of a world made new
where resources are shared
where no one goes hungry
and where all living things flourish and thrive.
Amen.

TO PONDER

Why is being 'rooted' and 'grounded' important in helping us to understand our place within creation?



TAKE ONE

Create a wildlife Easter Garden

All too often the Easter Garden is planted with ready-grown non-native flowers in plastic containers, which will only be discarded when the flowers fade a few weeks after Easter.

Could there be a better way?

A way that makes more room for both wildlife and God's creative power?

Perhaps you could choose a corner of churchyard to build a bigger and more prominent Easter Garden this year – one designed to last until Advent at least. Try to use pollinator friendly plants and flowers and living plants rather than cut flowers and consider what happened to the elements of the garden afterwards.

Perhaps the open grave could double as a hedgehog shelter?

In any case, sow plenty of native wildflowers, to provide a haven for pollinators throughout the summer.

Do not forget to add a source of water. Digging a pond in a churchyard may not be a great idea, but a small tub or bowl of water could be part of your Easter Garden design.

Last but not least, provide an interpretation board. Your wildlife friendly Easter Garden is testimony to the Creator's power to create and sustain life in all its rich diversity. Invite people to celebrate creation, and to say a prayer of thanks.

Indoors, some churches have organised their Easter Gardens in connection with local schools using recyclable materials and flowers created from recycled paper as symbols of resurrection and hope. Prayers can be written on the flowers and these can be 'planted' in the garden.

TAKE FIVE



1. CONNECT Outdoor Worship

The earth is a temple for God's glory. It is a privilege to serve and worship God as a royal priesthood, caring for creation. What better place to reflect on this than outdoors?

The Church of England website offers excellent practical advice for those who have never explored outdoor worship before: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/outdoor-worship>.



The website describes many successful examples of outdoor services and contains a comprehensive lists resources and liturgies.

At the end of this chapter you will find a sample service you could use.

2. CONTEMPLATE Stations of the Resurrection



- 1 Jesus is raised from the dead**
Find an image of spring flowers. Reflect on good news stories about the environment – sometimes hard to find, but vital to nurture hope to welcome a new dawn!
- 2 The finding of the empty tomb**
Find an empty eggshell. Reflect on the possibility of new life emerging in the midst of a broken world.
- 3 Mary Magdalene meets the risen Christ and proclaims his Resurrection to the disciples**
Find an image of women who live the story of resurrection hope in communities that have been damaged by climate change.
- 4 Jesus appears on the road to Emmaus**
Find a shoe. Reflect on the 'small steps' that we can take and think about how our daily choices can be the beginning of a better future.

5 Jesus is known in the breaking of bread

Find a piece of bread. Break the bread and reflect on how all God's creation partakes in the nurturing of our faith and hope.

6 Jesus appears to his disciples in Jerusalem and grants them the power to forgive sins

Find or make a small cross. Reflect on our need for forgiveness and renewal as we seek to respond to God's call. Take time to ask God what your next creation care calling might be.

7 Jesus strengthens the faith of Thomas and reveals his scars to him

Find an image of scarred landscape – a felled forest or an area that has been mined. Reflect on the scars that human activity leave on the land, and pray for restoration.

8 Jesus appears by the Sea of Tiberias

Find an image of polluted beach. Pray for conservationists, local people and activists who work to protect our coastlines.

9 Jesus forgives Peter and commands him to feed his sheep

Find an image of a flock of sheep. Pray for the farming community. Pray for new regenerative ways of farming in respectful harmony with nature, fuelled by the energy of God's creation.

12 Jesus commissions the disciples upon the mountain

Consider the fifth Mark of Mission: 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.' How can you proclaim the Good News of a new creation in Christ?

13 The Ascension of Jesus, to be seated at the right hand of God

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." (Psalm 19.1) Thank Jesus for his majestic reign and ask for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

14 Mary and the disciples wait in prayer

Light a candle and ask for God's peace to surround you in the midst of what seem insurmountable challenges for our planet.

15 The Holy Spirit descends at Pentecost

Find a feather. Reflect on the breath of God's life – the Holy Spirit – who sustains all living things, inspires us, and challenges us to work for the protection and renewal of God's creation.

16 Jesus appears to Saul

Pray for those in authority, that any who harm creation may be stopped in their tracks, and have their eyes opened to the truth of the Climate Crisis.

3. CREATE

Make a Seed Bomb

Making seed bombs is an easy and fun activity for young and old.

You will need:

- Native wildflower seeds
- Peat-free compost
- Powdered clay (found in craft shops), paper pulp, or flour
- Water
- Mixing bowl

There are many different recipes on the internet, i.e. on the website of the National Trust (using flour) and the Wildlife Trust (using clay). For every three handfuls of clay, you'll need about five handfuls of compost, and a handful of seeds. Mix all the ingredients together in the bowl until you reach the desired consistency – be careful not to add too much water! Shape the mix into balls, and leave to dry. Once dry, you can distribute them, perhaps to housebound members of the church? You could also hand them out at Baptisms – as symbols of new life emerging from the dark. 'Planting' is easy – just drop them wherever you want, but preferably on clear soil. Autumn and spring are best, and some rain will be beneficial for germination of the seeds.



4. REFLECT

Litter pick; Beach clean; Picnic

Litter pollutes the environment, threatening wildlife and spreading toxins. But litter picking is about more than creation care: When a community looks good and cared about, residents are happier, there is a reduced chance of antisocial behaviour, and an increased sense of pride. Litter picking addresses the last three of the Five Marks of Mission, and when framed in the context of worship, it is about all five marks of mission.



Why not start a parish litter pick once a month after church, or organise a seasonal family fun day and beach clean at a local beach? Easter is the ideal time for this – Jesus revealed himself at a picnic on the beach.

It is important to communicate why the church takes a lead in caring for the creation and the community. Actions speak louder than words. Take lots of pictures of the event!

Where to start

Many local authorities will lend items such as litter pickers and gloves to groups. Ward/council funding may be available to purchase equipment.

Keeping Safe

Neighbourhood Watch offers useful advice for litter pickers:

It is good practice to complete a risk assessment prior to a group litter pick and remember to brief the people taking part about staying safe. Explain to children which items are potentially dangerous and should not be picked up, and that if they are in any doubt, they should ask a grown up before picking the litter up. To help with understanding the risk, we advise that you avoid:

- Potentially hazardous objects, such as unidentified cans or canisters, oil drums and chemical containers

- Sharp objects such as broken glass and clinical waste such as needles/syringes – inform your local council and arrange for safe disposal
- Hazardous areas, such as deep or fast-flowing water, steep, slippery or unstable banks, sharp rocks, derelict buildings, and busy roads.
- Lifting heavy items that could lead to injury. Consider whether it's practical to remove heavy items, or whether they would be best removed by your local council

If you see someone fly tipping or come across hazardous waste, report it to the Environment Agency on its 24-hour hotline 0800 80 70 60 or contact the police.

Disposal

If possible, separate the litter in categories for recycling, i.e. plastics, aluminium cans, and general waste.

5. RESPOND

Nature recovery

Nature has an extraordinary ability to recover, even after many years of neglect and pollution.

Is there a small patch of land, a pond, or a woodland in your parish which is waiting to reveal God's resurrection power?



Perhaps you could join up with others in the community to nurture the natural life of this place, and improve access.

In 2012, A Rocha UK acquired a three-acre plot of land in Southall, West London. The Wolf Fields site was little more than an abandoned wasteland, notorious for fly tipping. But with the help of the community, the site was cleared of 54 tonnes of rubbish. It now provides the local community with access to a safe green space. There is an orchard, a community allotment, beehives, braille and audio interpretation, a sensory garden, a meadow, an art installation area, a prayer labyrinth, ponds and a story-telling arena for children. Local GPs have

begun to refer people to visit Wolf Fields to take part in activities that can improve health, wellbeing and social welfare.

In many places there are existing community projects like Wolf Fields. Can you think of a local example? How could the church support this project? Think about volunteering, but also consider offering financial support. Perhaps a coffee morning for a local nature rejuvenation project may attract new people and build new relationships.

Paul Ede's Grove Booklet E 169, on *Urban Eco-mission: Healing the Land in the Post-industrial City* (2013) is an inspiring read for those who want to explore further.



BONUS IDEAS

Earth Day – 22nd April

Every year on 22nd April, Earth Day marks the anniversary of the birth of the modern environmental movement in 1970.

The environmental movement was born in response to the unprecedented increase in the power of humanity to change and destroy the earth. For the first time in history, we developed nuclear bombs which could destroy all life on earth. But even without the bombs, we changed the climate, through population growth combined with unsustainable patterns of consumption, and through devastating levels of pollution.

Go and explore the Earth Day website, to learn more about this year's theme and campaigns, such as the 'Fashion for the Earth' sustainable fashion campaign.

Jesus said 'See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.'

Can you draw attention to some of the costs of our love of fashion?

- The fashion industry produces 100 billion pieces of clothing annually – for 7 billion people on Earth. We send approximately 40 million tons of textiles to landfills or to be incinerated every year.
- It takes nearly 3,000 litres of water to make one cotton t-shirt and 3,781 litres of water to make a pair of jeans.
- The fashion industry heavily pollutes water and local communities with toxic chemicals and dyes. 60% of all clothing is made of synthetic fibres such as polyester, which is an oil derivative containing high levels of microplastics. Washing synthetic clothing releases microplastics and contributes to 35% of all ocean microplastic pollution.
- Every year 150 million trees are cut down to make fabrics.
- 40 million people are living in modern slavery today and fashion is the second biggest contributor to this, with child labour common. The cost of fast fashion's cheap clothing is extracted from the workers.

Perhaps your church could organise a clothing bank? Even if you do not have space to store donations, you could organise a clothes swap event.

Rogation Sunday: Get your hands dirty!

1. Consider the worms!

The process of worms turning waste to wonder is something to behold. Maybe now is the time to try it...

<https://yuzumag.com/worm-composting/>

Create a wormery. You will find some simple instructions here

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2020/05/how-to-make-a-wormery/>


<https://www.verticalveg.org.uk/how-to-make-your-own-wormery/>

2. Explore the ground beneath your feet!

Find out about what makes healthy soil and the various layers that make up the earth in which things grow. Explore the following site for soil experiments and sensory activities <https://childsplayabc.wordpress.com/2021/07/01/soil-science-and-sensory-activities/>

Garden Organic, based in Coventry, offer information about a range of school based projects, training for education professionals and advice on growing things. <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/education>





If you have a patch of earth at home or next to your church, check out the health of your soil <https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/news-views/how-healthy-is-your-soil/> Will it support a bed for growing food produce?

3. Organise a big clean up in the church yard or grounds followed by an outdoor act of worship walking around the different areas of the church and the space around it to bless the parish that surrounds your church and to pray for its well being and flourishing and for protection against all that seeks to harm and damage its life.

4. Wild planting At the end of the service hand out seeds for people to plant. Pray that the seed will be a sign of God's creative activity in their lives and in their neighbourhoods and that God would bring growth and fruit in changed lives growing in the good soil of welcome and relationships. Give the congregation seeds to take home and plant and invite them to tend and future the seeds and to reflect on how we might tend and nurture God's life among us. Are our communities 'healthy soil' in which people of all ages can plant themselves and grow?



WORSHIP FOR EASTERTIDE:

Outdoor worship

GATHERING SONG

Laudate Dominum – Taizé (it helps to have a small group that can lead this chant which will be sung as the group moves from place to place).

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

All: **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

In resurrection hope
we gather to celebrate God's gifts in creation
and to remember our responsibility to bear witness
to the God who makes all things new.

MOVE TO THE EASTER GARDEN, SINGING...

We pray for all who need to see your new life today.
For all who struggle or who are afraid.
For all how need to hear you calling their name.

In the garden of your promise
Help us to remember our calling to be co-creators in your world;
Working for your new life
tilling the ground;
planting and nurturing;
watching for the harvest.

We rejoice in your faithfulness.

Come and meet us
in all our uncertainty and in all our hope.
Remind us of your future when all creation will be healed.

We offer you the green shoots of faith
asking that you would bring about growth.
God of new beginnings
revive our commitment to protect the Earth

All: **Surround us in your resurrection hope.**

MOVE TO THE DOORWAY, SINGING...

At the doorway,
we pray for all who enter our church
that they would find acceptance and welcome.

We pray for this place on the edge of change
where outsiders become friends
and where our faith encounters the challenges of the world.

In all the troubles of climate change;
in our desire to care for the world you have made;
in our wrong choices and short sighted thinking;

come and dwell in our hearts;
with the hope that new life is still possible
and in the belief that you call us to action
to bring life out of what seems hopeless.

God of our going out and coming in
help us to walk with you:

All: **Surround us in your resurrection hope.**

MOVE OUTSIDE 1, SINGING...

Outside 1

We pray for the spaces that you have entrusted to us
places where people and animals can find shade and shelter;
rest and relaxation.

May we treasure the grounds in which our church stands
the grass that grows;
the flowers and insects that populate them;
the busy life beneath the soil;
the trees, plants and shrubs that flourish here.

*(If you have an allotment or vegetable garden, or community
space, or healing garden pray for these spaces).*

We give thanks for the quiet spaces around our church;
for seats where we can relax and ponder;
for the evidence of life all around us.

May our church be fruitful soil for growing;
May we tend to the flourishing of your people.

God of our growth,
help us to plant our lives in your word.

All: **Surround us in your resurrection hope.**

MOVE TO OUTSIDE 2, SINGING...

We look to the sky above us
To the wild and whirling clouds, the sun and the rain.

We give thanks for the birds that fly;
the insects that hover;
for leaves blown by breezes,
for the air that we breathe.

For the power of your spirit resting upon us
for the inspiration of your voice calling us to new life;
for all that speaks to us of your sheltering care over all
that you have made:
we thank you, O God.

God of life,
May we work for your new creation
Trusting in our promise that all shall be well.

All: **Surround us in your resurrection hope.**

MOVE TO THE GRAVEYARD, SINGING...

We remember that there is a time for everything under heaven
for birth and for death;
for beginnings and endings.

We pray for all children that are born today
and for all people who are approaching the end of their days.

We trust that our lives are held in your loving hands
all time is yours
and you call us by name, you know us and you count
the hairs on our heads.

Teach us to live our lives on this planet
as though each day were the last.
Help us to face the seriousness of mass extinctions
and the destruction of eco-systems.
Help us to face up to our own part
in habits and choices that bring death, not life.

God of time and eternity
your tender care rests on all living things that you have made
and over the planet you shaped out of nothing.
May we better understand the power we have
and the great responsibility that rests with us.
May we commit ourselves afresh to bring life out
of the barren places,
bearing witness to your resurrection power.

All: **Surround us in your resurrection hope.**

MOVE TO THE GATE, SINGING...

We look to your world
beautiful but troubled.

We look to the peoples of this planet
Many of whom are suffering and without hope.

We pray for courage
to walk into your world in faith,
to listen for your voice
and to be agents of transformation.

God of all,
send us we pray
to be faithful witnesses to your healing power.
Send us to speak out against human destruction of the Earth;
send us with joy to treasure all created things.

All: Singing your song of a world made whole,
Surround us in your resurrection hope.

Amen

We are raised to new life in Christ.
Go in his peace. Alleluia, alleluia.

Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.

¹ Genesis 1:12

² Genesis 2:8

³ Jeremiah 29:5

⁴ Amos 9:14

⁵ Deuteronomy 8:7-8

⁶ John 19:41-42

⁷ Song of Solomon 6:11

⁸ Revelation 21:1

⁹ Philip Roderick Quotation in "About the Quiet Garden Movement," The Quiet Garden Movement, <https://quietgarden.org/> Accessed 21/09/22

¹⁰ Frances Hodgson Burnett "The Secret Garden," (London: Penguin, 2022), Chapter 27.

¹¹ Matthew 6:28,29

Ascension: On Earth as in Heaven



Prayer Novena

This is an excellent way to focus the parish in prayer for this important period of expectation of the promised Spirit. This is based in scripture: the disciples waited for nine days after the Ascension before the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost. This is the time when we focus on prayer across the Church of England as part of 'Thy kingdom come' and we are invited to consider the part we are called to play in ushering in the kingdom. What might the discipline of prayer help us to focus on in terms of creation care? You might like to focus on one aspect of creation care in your prayer each day, asking for the renewing and healing of the earth through the Holy Spirit. There is a suggestion for a pattern of prayer in the worship and action section.

The Lord's Prayer

Praying in the words of the Lord's Prayer is a good practice for us at this time inviting us to imagine earth 'as it is in heaven' and praying for God's kingdom to come as we wait for the outpouring of God's Spirit. The Lord's Prayer roots our connection with God in our daily lives – in daily bread and in daily provision from God of all that we need. Praying the Lord's Prayer also invites us to see things in the perspective of the kingdom and to understand what work we need to do so that things might be 'on earth as It is in heaven.'

Earth from space

Astronauts who have spent time on the International Space Station or visited the moon have been deeply challenged when they look back at the Earth from space. They see



its incredible beauty but can also see scarred landscape and even wildfires burning. Some of the destruction we have wrought is visible from space. The cognitive shift that occurs for astronauts is called the Overview Effect which includes a feeling of the fragility of Earth: 'a tiny fragile ball of life hanging in the void, shielded and nourished by a paper-thin atmosphere'.¹ You can read more about it here <https://abeautiful.world/stories/the-overview-effect/> We also need some 'big picture thinking' about what we

are doing. We can embrace the Overview Effect by looking at images from space and pictures of the Earth from space and considering how we feel about this perspective. Joanna Macy, a philosopher and ecologist, said: 'When you study images of the Earth...you're struck with such a gladness at that beauty and the originality of it, that you don't have time to think about how it is going to turn out. All you know is you'll serve it ...to the last breath.'²

Prayer

God of time and space
Earth and all her creatures are yours.
The wide firmament, the sun, moon, stars and planets
were set spinning by your hand.
Remind us of our true purpose and place within your creation
made in your image valued and precious to you,
yet part of a greater whole
the scale and scope of which we can only begin to imagine.
As we look at the beauty of the Earth,
we weep with you for the mess that we have made and commit
ourselves to play our part in mending a broken world
in the power and tenderness of the Holy Spirit
for the sake of your Son who came to reconcile all things in your love.
Amen.

TO PONDER

What could help us to find an 'Overview Perspective' and how might this shape our commitment to care for the Earth?



TAKE ONE

Prayer Novena

The days between Ascension day and Pentecost are traditionally set aside as a period of nine days of prayer. You might like to have an environmental focus for prayer on each of the nine days asking for God's Holy Spirit to move in the hearts of people and across the devastated parts of our Earth. For example: 1. Soil and growing things; 2. Air and the birds and insects; 3. Water and the parts of our planet where drought is an issue; 4. Icy regions and the

dangerous melting of glaciers and icecaps; 5. Animals in danger of extinction; 6. Food producers who work with sustainable farming methods; 7. Governments and decision makers that they will act with urgency; 8. Environmental justice and people of Global Majority Heritage; 9. People who work to renew and conserve the earth and all its creatures. Rob Kelsey's book *Praying for the Earth* contains short prayers and collects that focus on these and other environmental themes.³



Prayer for the wellbeing of cities and towns

God of all,
Your vision for the new creation
includes a city where all peoples can live in peace
and where every person and all creatures can enjoy security.

May we work for the restoration of our neighbourhoods;
protect spaces for enjoyment and peace;
and create homes where people can be safe.

We pray for the streets of our cities;
for flourishing community amongst inhabitants;
for the ability to challenge what is driven solely by profit.

We pray for space to rest and play;
for the protection of parks and local green space
for playgrounds and places to explore.

May we rebuild the ruined cities
and restore the devastated places
so that everyone can live without fear.

May we care for our church land,
tend it and treasure it
and make space for people, animals, birds and insects.

May we see our environment as a gift from you
and may we make in our small patch of earth
a foretaste of the heavenly city.

Amen



Pentecost:

The groaning of
the Spirit

We feel the excitement in the story of Pentecost in Acts 2 – the waiting and anticipation; the sensory details in the story a sound like a violent wind; tongues of fire and the ability to speak in other languages. Through the story is the sound of rushing wind bringing a call to risky living.

The air we breathe

What is air? The atmosphere of Earth is made up of several layers that vary in thickness according to temperature.

Earth's atmosphere is composed of approximately 78 percent nitrogen, 21 percent oxygen, 0.93 percent Argon, 0.04 percent carbon dioxide as well as trace amounts of neon, helium, methane, krypton, ozone and hydrogen, and water vapour.¹

How extraordinary our planet is within the solar system! None of us could live on this Earth without the atmosphere that supplies the air we breathe.

Wind ...spirit ...breath all describe God's activity in creation. In Hebrew the word *ruach* is used

and in Greek *pneumatōs*. In fact the first name for God in the Old Testament is linked to the word for wind (*ruach*). In Genesis 1 we are told: 'In the beginning ...the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters'.² God breeeeathes life into earth and in Genesis 2 breeeeathes life into the first human – the breath, the wind, the *ruach* of life.

Winds of change

In many stories, the blowing of the wind signifies change. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit gave the disciples power to speak and to bear witness to Christ's story, sometimes in ways that would bring them into conflict with the authorities and in ways that would lead to suffering, imprisonment or death. This is not the gentle movement of a quiet breeze ruffling the hair. Rather it is a mighty and mysterious movement of God through the Holy Spirit that enables people to do, say and be far more than they ever thought possible:



'Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as they had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.'³


Breath...air...breeze...wind... gale...tempest...hurricane: When the wind blows it can be playful or potent; life giving or dangerous; refreshing or disturbing. The breath of God, present before time began and brooding over the waters at Creation, the one who enlivens the dust from which Adam is shaped; the one who makes dry bones live and the whirlwind out of which God speaks to Job is the same disturbing Holy Spirit that descends to the disciples on the first Pentecost and that continues to comfort and call us to this day. God's activity in our lives is not only a 'one-off' at Pentecost. God's dynamic Spirit indwells us all of the time and is present in the church to ensure that we are constantly seeking and choosing life, including life for all creatures on our planet.

Living bones

The story of Ezekiel in the valley of the dry bones dramatically illustrates the wind of God's renewing power over the dead bones and to symbolise the renewal of Israel. If God can breathe life into what seems dead,

then there is some hope for this same renewing breath of God to sweep over the dead and desolate parts of our Earth, of our cities and of our own hearts. The wind that sweeps across the valley is God's enlivening breath that renews the dead bones that cover the ground. It is a sign of God's future plan for the restoration of Israel and a reminder that life comes from God. The bones are enlivened by the breath of God, in Hebrew 'ruach' or God's Spirit. This story calls us to pray for the areas of our planet that desperately need new life.

In the background of the breath of life that sweeps through the dead bones is the story of the wrongdoing of the people and the way that they ignored the voice of the prophets in order to carry on with their wrong choices. God's plans for a better future are still present even in this place of death. In fact it is in this place of death that the promise of God is heard: 'you shall live'. As we look around us at the destruction that our greed and selfishness has brought to our planet we may wonder whether life – whether we – can survive. The task of bringing life into this dead, dry scene seems too enormous for us to contemplate. Yet look at it we must. God asks: 'can these bones live? With Ezekiel we respond: O Lord God, you know.'⁴ This we affirm our faith in God's power to bring healing beyond our expectations. Today, God calls us for his purposes: "prophesy to these bones.'⁵ It is here that we need to call for the breath of God



to rattle and disturb; to transform and make whole. It is here too that we must call for the breath of God to change our hearts and challenge us to find new ways of living in the land and fresh alternatives that provide the conditions for life to flourish. There is hope. As Hopkins wrote:

And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs.⁶

Breath of life for the church

When we pray 'Thy kingdom come' we are asking for the gifts and strength that we need to live through difficult times. The challenges of speaking up for shared resources and limited consumption may make us unpopular. When we pray for the wind of God's spirit to fill us and to enliven our churches we may be asked for more than we can give and we may be taken to places that we may not have wished to see. God's breath is blowing life into our tired hearts and our dead structures. God continues to call us to new ways of living, fresh depths of commitment and reawakened action to save the planet from destruction. But we are not alone

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah!
bright wings.⁷

Prayer

God of life,
fill us with your Holy Spirit;
wake us from sleep.

Inspire us to new ways of living
and greater commitment to sharing what we have.

Renew our lives in community; challenge us to let go of the things in which we place our security and to place our trust in you;
so that as you call us to simple living we might respond with glad hearts and open hands and walk more faithfully in the way of your Son.

Amen.

TO PONDER

How does an understanding of the Holy Spirit 'brooding over creation' give you hope as you care for creation?



TAKE ONE

Library of things

The people of the early church described in the book of Acts 'had everything in common.'⁸ 'No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.'⁹

Consider whether your church could host a 'library of things' for the local community. This could consist of a collection of tools and items of household equipment, a second-hand exchange shop, a toy rehoming space or even a library of talents and expertise.

This is an excellent way to engage with creation care in areas of deprivation. The church of St Hilda of Whitby, in Grangetown, Middlesborough, started a Baby Clothes Exchange Bank. With the help of a small grant and a supportive church community, churchwarden and Community Minister Chris purchased storage, start-up clothes packs, a new hot water boiler and more, to turn the church hall into a welcoming space for parents and carers. The space is not just for those who need to exchange or receive clothes, but one of welcome and community, a space for children to play, coffee and tea to be served and friendships to be found. The

Baby Bank has already received a large amount of support from local residents and further afield. Books, clothes, toys and home-made knitted new-born clothes have filled up the storage areas in the church.

Another example is the Buy Nowt LS6 Library of Things, based in Headingley Methodist Church, Leeds. They have created a 'library' of things that people use infrequently but would normally have to buy and store, such as power tools, holiday equipment and camping equipment. Borrowing saves money, space in the home, and reduces waste.

In many places, repair and reuse cafés have been started where people can come and get help to mend broken things or learn repair skills. This is another excellent approach to reducing waste.

To think about

1. What would work in your community?
2. Could your church share resources or equipment with neighbouring churches?
3. How can this become an intergenerational activity where a wide range of resources can be shared?

TAKE FIVE



1. CONNECT

Bird loss

UK wildlife continues to decline because of climate change and loss of habitat. The State of the World's Birds report¹⁰ shows that the expansion and intensification of agriculture is placing 73% of bird populations under intense pressure. Globally, 49% of bird species are declining and one in eight species are threatened with extinction.¹¹ Some of the most common anthropocene pollutants are: noise, light, polluted air, heavy metals, radioactive compounds,



pesticides, pharmaceuticals, oil, and plastic pollution which are all degrading eco systems and affect bird fitness and survival.¹²

What scientific research has established we already know in our hearts to be true. Familiar sightings of common birds are becoming rarer events to the detriment of our wellbeing. Lack of information has a more insidious impact: it normalises this impoverishment by dangling growth and development in front of our eyes as the goal that makes these losses acceptable.

Birds as early warning signals

The health of the bird population is linked to human health. If we carry on destroying nature at our current rate, humans will be increasingly exposed to zoonotic diseases that originate in wildlife. In 2022, scientists have warned that we have 'probably breached the planetary boundary for how much chemical pollution the Earth can handle and still remain a suitable home for human beings.'¹³ Raptor persecution is an issue in itself, but even the birds that are not victims of crimes against wildlife are exhibiting signs of poisoning from general pollution. As they are at the top of the bird food chain, the impact on their bodies is magnified which makes them indicators of a toxic future for the planet unless better regulation is put into place.

What can we do?

The RSPB has revealed that around 600 million birds have been lost in 40 years across Europe – a fact they describe as ‘really, really scary.’¹⁴ Find out about the decline in bird species. Share your views on what can be done and what would be lost if some birds disappear from our lives completely. You might like to join an organisation that is working to protect nature, to raise awareness of the decline in birds in towns and countryside and to challenge some government policy that results in damage to bird habitats.

2. CONTEMPLATE

Cloud appreciation

Look at the clouds! This is a restful and contemplative activity for all ages. Can you name the clouds? Can you tell the difference between cirrus and cumulus? You might like to consult this helpful guide from the Met office <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/learn-about/weather/types-of-weather/clouds>



Clouds have shapes and textures all of their own: wispy; billowing; threatening; whirling; swishing... and so much more! It was not until the early 19th Century that Luke Howard, a British meteorologist and scientist, introduced the naming of three basic cloud shapes: cirrus, cumulus and stratus. Cloudwatching is best

enjoyed when you have some space and time to be in creation for a while and settle into mindful looking and observing. Many clouds simply float by in gentle way. After watching for a few minutes talk together about thoughts and ideas that have come into mind as you have watched. Ask questions about the shapes and images you can see. Can you see any clouds like the ones in the images?

You might like to use the following simple prayer response which helps us to focus on our breath. Find a quiet space and sit for a few moments. Be aware of your feet planted on the floor and the rhythm of your breathing in ...and out ; in ...and out. Notice the pattern of your breathing and give thanks for the breath of life that sustains you. Now try to take some deep breaths, counting as you breathe in 1,2,3 and then out 1,2,3. Repeat several times. This can be coupled with a short sentence such as “ breathe in God’s peace ... breathe out all stress.”

You might like to look at and explore clouds in art.

1. Georgia O’Keefe’s painting ‘Above the Clouds’ (1962-1963) or Sky Above Clouds (1965) pondering what these perspectives reveal. If you could look down and see the earth with all its beauty and all its environmental destruction, what would you say to human beings?



2. John Constable painted a series of cloud studies which you can use as part of your prayer or reflection.

Clouds feature in the Bible as indicators of God's guidance through the wilderness and of God's hidden and mysterious presence: 'Cloud and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.'¹⁵

In nature, clouds are signs of God's activity in sending rain for growing things as Psalm 147 tells us: 'He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills.'¹⁶ They are also a source of endless wonder, because 'Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?'¹⁷ Give thanks to God for this extraordinary and beautiful aspect of creation.

3. CREATE

Wind power

Make a windmill, fly a kite or create an up cycled wind chime. In the story of the pouring out of God's Spirit there is a sound like rushing wind. Most of the time we do not hear the wind we only see its effects. Making or doing any of these activities can help us to reflect on the invisible power of the wind to generate energy and to move what seems lifeless.

You can create wind chimes from a variety of different materials including cleaned and empty tin cans attached to a lampshade frame or using different lengths and widths of bamboo cane. For the tin can wind chime you will need: the wire frame of a lampshade; eight cans of different sizes; a hammer and large nail to create a hole in the bottom of each can; paint to decorate the cans and brushes for painting; some thin rope to push through the hole and to attach each of the cans to the frame of the lampshade. You can also make a wind chime using old keys of different sizes painting them and hanging onto a wire frame as with the tin can version.



4. REFLECT

Groaning with the Spirit

In Romans chapter 8, Paul writes about the Spirit of God: 'the Spirit intercedes for us

through wordless groans ' (8: 26). A few sentences earlier, he explains that we all 'groan' as we wait eagerly for our redemption (8: 23). And lastly, the whole creation, subjected to frustration and decay, has been 'groaning as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the present time ' (8:22).

The Spirit, we ourselves, and all of creation, are joined together in an expectant waiting and wordless groaning: for a better time, for a new horizon, for a new creation. But our waiting and groaning does not need to be passive – it



can be active. We groan as we work hard to push for change.

Watch this [video](#) by the Bible Project¹⁸, which explains that we are created in God's Image, and as such chosen to be co-rulers and co-workers alongside God, commissioned to develop the world and its resources, to take it into new horizons. Then reflect on St Paul's words from Romans 8.19-25. 'Creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.' (vs 19)

How can we, the children of God, recover our God-given calling to 'subdue and rule' creation and move from cruel domination to loving care for creation? How can we, with the help of God's Spirit, open a new horizon, and welcome in God's new creation?

5. RESPOND

Air Pollution and your Church

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has highlighted the silent killers in our atmosphere, pointing out that 90% of the world's population breathes in air that is polluted. Their website offers information about air pollution and how it is caused together with data and fact sheets that are useful for any group beginning to reflect on an issue that impacts on the health of all of us.



The creation stories in the book of Genesis describe how all creatures (not just the humans) are animated and sustained by the 'breath of life' they received from God. Breath and air are symbols of God's Spirit. Without air, we cannot live.

Ella, a nine-year old girl from south-east London, died in February 2013 after suffering three years of ever worsening Asthma. In 2020, a new inquest into the cause of her death looked at the role of air pollution. The coroner concluded that illegal levels of air pollution from traffic near her London home were "a significant contributory factor to both the induction and exacerbations of her asthma." Ella is now the first person in the world to have air pollution listed as a cause of death on her death certificate.¹⁹ Her mum Rosamund Kissi-Debrah has become an outspoken campaigner: "You can pump all the money you want into the NHS, but unless you clear up the air, more and more people will become ill," she said. "My concern regarding global health is that every year we churn out the figures – air pollution causes nine million premature deaths – but no one is held accountable."²⁰ In the UK alone, air pollution is linked to 40,000 early deaths a year, and although smoking remains the biggest cause of lung cancer, outdoor air pollution causes about one in 10

cases in the UK, with an estimated 6,000 people who have never smoked dying of lung cancer every year.²¹

It is worth considering how churches could reduce their contribution to air pollution. Could people be encouraged to walk or cycle to church? Could people share lifts? Are the public transport links to church well-advertised? Could the clergy (sometimes forced to clock up many miles between churches on Sunday morning) receive financial support to switch to Electrical Vehicles? Could the church install one or more EV charging points?

Check out Air pollution across the globe with a real time Air Quality map where you can discover what the air quality is like near you.

<https://waqi.info/#/c/2.412/0/2z>

Google Earth has also initiated a monitoring programme measuring pollutants in the

atmosphere starting in London and Copenhagen.

<https://www.google.com/earth/outreach/special-projects/air-quality/>

You might like to look at the following activities relating to KS1/2/3 some of which can be adapted to use in children's work or in families and households.

<https://schools.leicester.gov.uk/media/6203/air-quality-experiments-and-activities-for-home-and-school-v6.pdf>

Teachers may also like to use the teaching activities from Environmental Protection UK and activity 1b *Design a poster that shows what causes pollution in your local area* could easily be used in intergenerational groups in churches.

<https://www.healthyair.org.uk/documents/2013/02/healthy-air-education-pack-2012.pdf/>



Thanksgiving for the elements

The arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was made tangible in the four elements of nature: **Air**, 'a sound like the blowing of a violent wind'; **Fire**, 'tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them'; **Earth**, 'Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven' and **Water**, 'Those who accepted the message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.'

The following Prayers of Thanksgiving can be used in a creation-focused Pentecost celebration, indoors or outdoors. Perhaps you could ask children to collect items to represent each of the elements: a bowl of water, a pot of soil, a candle flame, and a bird's feather to represent air?

Air

We thank you, O God:

for the great sky above us:
the firmament and the atmosphere,
complex and multilayered,
reaching to the edge of outer space.


For the clouds that sail high in the heavens;
for the rising and sinking of the air in the atmosphere across the globe;
for the wings of the wind on which you walk
and the breath of life that enlivens all things.

For breeze and zephyr;
Easterlies and Westerlies; trade winds, tropical wind and Polar air;
For the mighty jet stream
and its pathway across our planet.

We give thanks for the birds of the air:
all the flying creatures and insects;
for the song of the nightingale
the cooing of the dove and the hooting of the owl:
for all living things that sail on currents of air by day and by night.

We give thanks, O God,
that you stretch out the heavens;
that we see your power as mighty wind;
we hear the whisper of your still, small voice
and know your gentle presence,
closer to us than breathing.

Breathe on us again, O Lord:
fill us with your Spirit



that we might trust in your leading
and live as you intend on the Earth.

For your life within us and your voice to guide us
Thanks be to God!

Bible links: Psalm 104

Earth

We give thanks for the dry land you separated from the waters;
the shapes and textures of seven great continents
formed through fire and ice.

For land as ancient as time
and newly made masses of earth.

For Earth's shell and the shifting tectonic plates,
sliding across the molten mantle.

For the surface of our Earth
Its great mountains reaching to the sky
craggy and wild

For the rolling hills and gorse-covered moorland.

For plateaux, pampas and rolling plain

Ice sheets that sculpt the land beneath

For rock and stone;

pebble and grit

gravel, shingle and precious stones.

For costal ranges, dizzying cliffs

valleys and cwms.

We give thanks for the life that has come from the ground:

for the trees and plants that grow from the rich earth;

the roots and trunks that dig into the ground that supports their life

the branches in which the birds of the air can rest

and where animals find shelter.

For farmland, fertile crescents and fields

crops that grow and ripen

producing harvest for the world.

We give thanks that we are creatures of earth;

that you created us from the dust,

and breathed life into us.

We give thanks for the plentiful land into which the people of God were

brought for the peace and security that is your intention for us;

for the building of homes where we can enjoy the fruits of our labour

and rest beneath the vines.

For the renewal of the city
and the sign of the kingdom that this reveals to us.
For the renewal of your creation;
for the tree that stands at the end of time in the city of God,
speaking to us of a new heaven and a new earth
and your purpose for us and for all living things.
For the breath that brings life from death:
thanks be to God!

Bible links: Jeremiah 2:7; Ecclesiastes 12:7

Water

We give thanks for your Spirit brooding over the waters of chaos;
and for life emerging.

We give thanks for the oceans teeming with life
the liquid surface of our big blue planet

Polar ice and lakes;
rivers and streams carving pathways across the land;
Loughs, canals, wetlands and lochs.

For the water we drink – fresh and cool.
For rain that waters the crops and gives life to plants and trees;
For the water in which we swim;
on which we sail;
into which we dive.

For the treasures of that other underwater world:
the coral and fish; the great whale and the shark;
seal, narwal and walrus

For the streams that run through the land
and all the creatures that live in them;
Otter, Beaver and Dragonfly;
Eel, Bream and Broach;
Perch, Pike and Carp; Trout and Salmon;
for all creatures that find life by fresh water.

For the great waters through which you led your people
for the water from the rock as a sign of your blessing
for the water of life we find in your presence:
priceless and satisfying
thirst quenching and life giving.

For the water in which we are baptised;
for the water of forgiveness and new life.

For water turned into wine;
the healing pools and life giving wells;
for the water of life from the side of Christ.
For the crystal river that runs through the heavenly city
the water that flows for all eternity
past the throne of your kingdom at the end of time
bringing life and healing to all creation.
For water that cleanses, refreshes and makes whole:
thanks be to God!

Bible links: Genesis 1:1

Fire

For the light of your word in Creation;
For the great light of the day
and the light of the moon to guide our nights;
For the stars that twinkle –
bright points of light from far away.
For your call to Moses from the burning bush
that burned but was not consumed;
and for your voice speaking to us through the world around us.
For the angels of light
the heavenly host of your fiery messengers
revealing to us truths beyond our earthly knowing.
For the pillar of fire that led the people of God
in their wilderness wanderings.
For your word like fire
In the mouths of the prophets
and your word of love which burns in our lives
bringing comfort and power
and refining us like precious metal;
For your warming word in scripture
for the promises that light our way
and Inspire us along the road.
For the tongues of fire at Pentecost
and your Spirit resting upon us
to reveal to us your presence.
For your call to live as children of light
in this earthly life;
and for the everlasting heavenly brightness

Your glory over all the earth at the end of time
into which we will be gathered.

For the comfort and challenge of light and fire
thanks be to God!

Bible links: Exodus 13:21; 40:38; Zechariah 13:9; Jeremiah 23:29;
Acts 2:1-15

¹ Source: <https://www.space.com/17683-earth-atmosphere.html> and for more science see <https://visionlearning.com/en/library/Earth-Science/6/Composition-of-Earths-Atmosphere/107>

² Genesis 1:1

³ Acts 2:42-47

⁴ Ezekiel 37:3

⁵ Ezekiel 37:4

⁶ Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur," in "Poems and Prose," London: Penguin Classics, 1985

⁷ Hopkins, "God's Grandeur".

⁸ Acts 2:44

⁹ Acts 4:32

¹⁰ Birdlife International <https://www.birdlife.org/state-of-the-worlds-birds/>

¹¹ Phoebe Weston, "Half of world's bird species in decline as destruction of avian life continues," Guardian online, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/28/nearly-half-worlds-bird-species-in-decline-as-destruction-of-avian-life-intensifies-aoe/28/09/22>

¹² Freddie-Jeanne Richard, India Southern, Mari Gigauri, Ginevra Bellini, Oscar Rojas, Anne Runde "Warning on nine pollutants and their effects on Avian Communities," Global Ecology and Conservation Volume 32, December 2021, e01898 Elsevier

¹³ Ida Emilie Steinmark, "How birds of prey are exposing a toxic time bomb," Guardian online 25/09/22 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/25/how-birds-of-prey-are-exposing-a-toxic-time-bomb>

¹⁴ Alex Thompson, "Around 600 million birds lost in 40 years, RSPB study finds," 16/11/2021 <https://www.channel4.com/news/around-600-million-birds-lost-in-40-years-rspb-study-finds>

¹⁵ Psalm 97:2

¹⁶ Psalm 147:8

¹⁷ Job 38:37

¹⁸ <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/image-of-god/>. The Bible Project is a crowdfunded non-profit animation studio, producing short videos aimed at making the biblical story more accessible. <https://bibleproject.com/>

¹⁹ Read Ella's full story on the Ella Roberta Foundation website: <https://ellaroberta.org/>

²⁰ Hannah Devlin, "Cancer breakthrough is a 'wake-up' call on danger of air pollution" in The Observer, 10 Sep 2022.

²¹ Michelle Roberts, "UK air pollution 'linked to 40,000 early deaths a year'" in BBC News, 23 Feb 2016.

Ordinary Time:

'The great green growing season'¹

We are now back in what is called ‘Ordinary Time’ – where we seek to live out our faith in our ordinary lives. However, the journey into the life and the love of God that are as wide and as deep as the sea’s mystery is no ordinary journey. Ordinary time lived in this world with all its possibility and all its pain, calls out from us the most extraordinary responses of hope and courage.

Rhythm of life

Ordinary Time also reminds us of the biblical principle of ‘sabbath’. After the acts of creation described in Genesis 1, God rested from all the work that he had done.² The sabbath principle is embedded in the Ten Commandments and underpins the life of the people of God as described in the Old Testament. The idea of sabbath rest offers us a way to return to the affirmation of God’s creation that he described as ‘good’ and to

God’s ongoing work of sustaining and developing creation so that every living thing can rest in God’s presence. In a world full of constant motion, activity and noise; 24/7 digital connectedness and shopping on every day of the week, sabbath calls the Christian community to counter-cultural living that challenges the consumer call to more; replacing it with God’s call to pause and reflect.

Recovering equilibrium

Jesus understood well the principle of activity balanced by contemplation and prayer. When the disciples returned from teaching, Jesus told them to: ‘come away and rest awhile.’³ Jesus himself finds places for rest and goes to a solitary place to pray regularly and habitually,⁴ understanding that action needs to be rooted in prayerfulness if it is to be truly life giving. The story of Mary and Martha also offers us a picture of what is needed for a balanced rhythm of life. Activists should be mindful of this balance and of the need to rediscover the practice of sabbath – time for refreshment and retreat in order to prepare for the next challenge. For Christian climate activists and environmentalists, sabbath rest is a way of restoring



the balance between activity and contemplation, so that our actions are rooted in prayer and our prayer inspires new actions.

The idea of balance also extends to how we should view the way in which we work the earth and whether our actions are working in harmony with the land or against its better flourishing. There is a time for ploughing, sowing and feeding; and a time for gathering, reaping and harvesting. The earth upon which we depend for our food also needs sabbath rest. The system of crop rotation and of laying land fallow for rejuvenation is part of working with wisdom on the land. It is embedded in many modern farming practices, and is essential to the preservation of the health of the soil.

Playfulness

When he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him,
like a master worker,
and I was daily his delight,
playing before him always
Playing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the
human race.⁵

God's delight is seen in all that is made in creation and we too should take time to delight in it. Sometimes it seems as if we have grown so accustomed to the story of God's overflowing joy in creation that we somehow fail to



make space for wonder. At this point in the Church year, we have another opportunity to reconnect to the story of all of God's manifold works and to get out and about in creation to explore and experience – and immerse ourselves in – the marvels with which we are surrounded. We might find ourselves experiencing amazement at the Earth's diversity and its delicate balance of ecosystems; joy at the individuality and beauty of even the smallest things; wonder at the vast scale of mountains, oceans, icebergs, deserts, steppes, wilderness – and yes at the rolling hills of Surrey, the brooding highlands of Scotland and the wild and wind-swept moors of North Yorkshire and so much more!


Slowing down

This time of year often includes holiday time and an opportunity for rest and recreation. Our holiday habits are also places where we can make a difference by choosing our destinations and our transport wisely. Choosing where to go and how to travel in an eco-friendly way is an activity that should involve everyone in the group. Some companies offer eco-tourism options but it is always good to recognise the impact of tourism on local communities not just in terms of the economy but also in terms of the impacts caused by increased traffic, air pollution, degradation of the local environment in 'tourism hot-spots' and increased pressure on facilities. We might consider how we travel and whether we can

consider more eco friendly means of getting to our destinations.

We live in anxiety-inducing times. This anxiety frequently spills over into the way we need to fill up every available minute of time with programmed activity, including in our church life, in our increasingly busy programmes with children and young people, in mission activities and fundraising. Ordinary Time reminds us to slow down and to find space for reflection and processing. Ordinary Time invites us to build resilience for the next challenge. Ordinary Time also reminds us of the need to make space to be in creation and to play in it – and then to be with children as they explore God's creation and express their own amazement at it and their anger at the ways in





which our lifestyles and choices are destroying what is precious. Anyone who has walked in nature with children will recognise the time it takes to get from A to B because of stopping to stare at a worm or a tiny insect; to look into a puddle and imagine what you can see there; to look into a tree and see the shifting patterns of leaves and branches or to collect feathers, stones and leaves. Adults need to rediscover the

joys of going slow, to take time to recognise the signs of God's infinite goodness and creativity; to consider God's play through the works of creation and God's call to us to treasure and protect all living things. It is good for adults to remember how to be childlike in our appreciation of the world around us. Perhaps we should jump in some puddles if any are available...!

Prayer

God our maker and shaper,
we thank you for the extraordinary value you place on ordinary things
and the part they play in making visible what is unseen;
the intricate beauty of living things
the diversity of all human life
the variety of gifts with which you surround us.
We place into your hands the ordinary things of our lives:
our commitments; our daily choices; our relationships;
and the humble offering of our prayers and our whole selves.
Feed us ordinary bread and wine;
transform us by your Spirit to be more like you
and make us capable of extraordinary things
for the gospel's sake
until our ordinary lives are gathered
into your extraordinary and eternal brightness.
Amen.

TO PONDER

When did you last take time to 'go slow' and what did you notice about God's creation around you?

A Reflection for Ordinary Time





God's gifts

This short homily by Revd Johannes Nobel provides an appropriate reflection for any time of the year. You may wish to amend the contents according to your own context.

People from Yorkshire and people from Holland have something in common. We want the best deal. We love a bargain. Who doesn't love a Yorkshire bargain?

Well, that's what I am here to talk about today. *The biggest bargain ever.*

You see, we all feel the pinch at the moment. Inflation is at 10%. Everything is more expensive than it was a year ago.

But last week, I had a real shock, when I received my energy bill. I knew gas and electricity had gone up too. But it was all the rest that shocked me.

It was all itemised, mind you.

Our household of four had somehow managed to breathe in over 4 million litres of air this month. So, there was the *photosynthesis and respiration charge* for that.

Next, it turns out the four of us used about half a million litres of water. We didn't drink all that, of course. This was the water that went into producing our food, our clothing, our gadgets, and who knows what else. All I can tell you is that it added up.

Then there were the *bee and insect levies* on top of that.

And not to forget the *Natural Health Service contribution*. Thankfully we'd only watched three sunsets this month. But I had indulged in birdwatching. And we had been picking blackberries as a family. One afternoon, my little girl had spent hours just watching the clouds drift by. And my son, when he was at camp, had watched the stars. Hello *starlight premium charge*.

So, you can imagine that I hardly dared look at the second page of the bill. And the third one.

But this is the amazing thing. This is what I wanted to tell you about. The true shock came on the last page. Because this is what it said: *All the items listed above under the heading 'Creation' are provided free of charge. All costs incurred are carried by the Creator. To find out more about the Creator, click here.*

So, no premium fees for starlit skies, all-inclusive sunsets, no payment for insect services, no charge for all that water, nothing to pay to the trees and for the oxygen they provided, and free blackberries in every hedgerow! It was all paid for by the Creator.

I couldn't get over it. It seemed too good to be true. Who would give all these beautiful things away for free? So, I clicked on that link, to find out more about the Creator, and I read this, from the Book of Job, Job 12:7-10:

*“But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth,[c] and they will teach you,
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.*

God our Creator holds us in his hands. The very air we breathe, is his. *‘The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.’*

But God the Creator is the most generous giver. He shares creation with us. All the earth’s most wonderful sights, delicious tastes and smells, fruits of the harvest, fresh air, beautiful birdsong, clean water, wildflowers in the light of the sun. Everything for free.

‘Bargain’ isn’t the right word, really. It’s a gift. A free and unconditional gift. It is amazing grace. It is pure love.

Thank you, good Lord.

Amen.





In a group setting

Discuss the reflection together. If we put a price on nature, would that help us to value it more? How would we calculate the price and the value of nature? Explore the ways in which we understand and show appreciation for God's generosity in Creation. Invite the congregation to name the gifts of God that they most want to give thanks for today.

Morning glory, starlit sky,
soaring music, scholar's truth,
flight of swallows, autumn leaves,
memory's treasure, grace of youth:

Open are the gifts of God,
gifts of love to mind and sense;
hidden is love's agony,
love's endeavour, love's expense.

Love that gives, gives ever more,
gives with zeal, with eager hands,
spares not, keeps not, all out-pours,
ventures all its all expends.

Drained is love in making full,
bound in setting others free,
poor in making many rich,
weak in giving power to be.

Therefore he who shows us God
helpless hangs upon the tree;
and the nails and crown of thorns
tell of what God's love must be.

Here is God: no monarch he,
throned in easy state to reign;
here is God, whose arms of love
aching, spent, the world sustain.⁶

¹ This evocative description is used in the Godly Play script for the Liturgical Year and sums up the idea that the weeks of 'Ordinary Time' focus our attention on what makes for growth in our own lives and in the lives of our communities and our world.

² Genesis 2:1-3

³ Mark 6:31

⁴ For example in Matthew 14:13; Mark 1:35; Mark 4:36; Mark 6:31; Mark 6:46; Luke 5:16; Luke 6:12; John 4:6

⁵ Proverbs 8:29b-31 NRSVUE

⁶ W. H. Vanstone 1976, printed in "Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense: The response of Being to the Love of God," (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1977).

An abstract artwork featuring a complex, branching structure of gold lines. The lines originate from the top center and spread outwards, forming a shape reminiscent of a stylized 'Y' or a network of veins. The background is a soft, textured wash of colors, including warm oranges and yellows at the top, transitioning through pale blues and greens to a deep, dark blue at the bottom. The overall effect is ethereal and organic, suggesting a process of growth or creation.

Trinity:
The dance of
creation

At the feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given not to offer protection from the world's problems but to give courage and strength for daily living. The gift of the Holy Spirit transformed the lives of the disciples and marked the beginnings of the early church. Soon afterwards there were new challenges and new dangers. For the Church today, the days after Pentecost focus our minds on what it means to follow Jesus and to live lives in community that bear witness to God's all-embracing love and its power to change hearts and minds.

A relationship of love

Trinity Sunday is often a Sunday that preachers dread. They struggle to find an appropriate way of describing the mystery of the

Trinity and become entangled in complex mathematical conundrums or over-stretched metaphors. But the Trinity is at the heart of the Christian faith and it takes us to the heart of God and to the relationship of love that is the life of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is into this kind of relationship, characterised by self-giving love, difference and unity that we are called. The beginning of the story is in the community of persons that is God. In love, creates a world from nothing; in love, God creates people for relationship and in love, God desires all things to be reconciled to God's self. This is the God who, when the relationships between humans and God are broken, in Christ enters into a broken world to offer a way of restoration.




Scriptural suggestions of God as Trinity

All three persons of the Trinity were involved in creation itself. There are Trinitarian parallels between Genesis 1 and John 1. In John 1, we can see the Trinitarian nature of God being revealed to us in scripture. 'In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.' The word for 'wind' is sometimes translated as the Spirit of God. We also hear echoes of the creation story: 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him...'¹ The doctrine of the Trinity has direct implications for how we understand God's activity in creation and redemption. We desperately need to rediscover how to teach and preach the Trinity to all ages not as 'a really difficult bit of Christian doctrine', but as a fundamentally practical teaching about the life of God and our participation in the divine dance of love.

Trinitarian hospitality

One of the most beautiful and compelling images of the Trinity is Rublev's icon. The story that lies behind this icon can be found in Genesis 18 where Abraham sits down to rest under the shade of an oak tree in the heat of the day. He encounters three mysterious visitors and invites them to share food prepared by Sarah. The icon depicts three figures seated around a table. The figures are distinctive and beautiful in their own right but the circular gaze of the persons and the loving regard of the figures one to another suggests





relatedness. Here there are persons united and yet different; at one and yet remarkably individual. At the front of the icon is an open space into which an invitation to relationship is extended to us and to all creation. God invites us to join the eternal dance of love that is at the heart of all things.

The icon is all about hospitality. Abraham offers hospitality, 'entertaining angels unawares' and God in his Trinitarian love, opens a space for us to be drawn into the embrace of God's welcome. God's nature is thereby revealed as radically hospitable.

Church as hospitable space

God's radical hospitality is practised in the early church we read about in Acts. The practice of hospitality and sharing is at the heart of what it means to follow Christ and to make Christ known. Hospitality is all about extending our privilege across barriers – making outsiders insiders. This story of course begins with God's hospitality – God's creation of a place for us within everything that God had made. In the book of Acts we are told that:

All who believed together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day....they broke bread at home and ate their

food with glad and generous hearts....and day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.²

Sometimes the Church turns its attention to this account and ponders it as a model for doing mission. At a time of crisis over rising food prices and spiralling costs it becomes imperative that we seek ways of living that do not cost the earth and that look out for others who may be in more need than we are ourselves. Many of our churches also have some land around them where can create hospitable spaces for animals and birds, modelling what we preach about creation care by developing habitats of welcome. Some churches have become community hubs often centred on food and local need.

Hospitality and the sharing of all we have is the beginning of mission and the cornerstone of real Christian community. Its effects can be life changing – for us as well as for those we welcome. Henri Nouwen described hospitality as 'primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people but to offer them space where change can take place'.³ Hospitality extends to all species of life on the planet not just to human life. God's eternal recreative

power and God's self-giving love demonstrate a way of being that we are called to imitate in the way we live on the Earth and in community with one another. The Trinity as an essentially practical doctrine asks us to reimagine our life together and our relationship with the whole created order. We are challenged to create genuinely hospitable spaces and in so doing we may find that God in three persons meets us in this space where all things become possible.

June is the time for us to mark Refugee Week, offering us opportunities to consider God's call to us to demonstrate radical generosity and hospitality towards those fleeing their homeland because of persecution, war,

famine, drought or other immeasurable suffering and hopelessness. We also mark World Environment Day during this month.

This county has a long and proud tradition of welcoming of people from many different cultures, beliefs and ethnicities and finding our own lives enriched by what they offer to our own communities. Unfortunately, hostility towards refugees and asylum seekers is a growing issue. It is sometimes hard as Christians to assert a different view of welcome in a world where many countries are counting numbers and measuring the strength of borders. And yet...we worship a God who has in Christ destroyed

all dividing walls and who calls us to love even when the cost seems high and the consequences demanding. This call will become increasingly pressing as people are forced to leave their homes because of climate change and because areas of our planet have become incapable of sustaining life.





Prayer

God of the dance

You welcome us in and call us to step to your rhythm
to move to your prompting
to follow your lead.

In your relatedness

You reveal to us the power of unity in difference
and the power of self-giving
so that all people might find their place;
learn the steps of the dance
and discover how to belong.

May we in our life together

so demonstrate the simplicity and beauty of being in relationship
and the joy at the heart of creation
that all may be drawn into the ever-widening circles of your love.

Amen.

TO PONDER

How does God as communion challenge a narrative of dominance over creation and invite us to rethink our place in creation?



TAKE ONE

Make space for wildlife

‘Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God?’⁴

Wildflowers

No matter how big or how small the grounds around your church are – you can create a home for wildlife. Even an urban church can grow pollinator friendly wildflowers in plant pots. But if you are fortunate to have an old churchyard, it is well worth selecting a quiet sunny corner to let the grass grow long and give

native wildflowers a chance. Do not introduce new species! You will be surprised how many different grasses and flowers will appear – once they are given a chance. The website of Caring for God’s Acre contains invaluable advice and resources.

Bug and Bee Hotels and Hedgehog hideaways

Approach a local business for some old wooden pallets and ask the local primary school or youth club to help build a bug hotel. Bug hotels are best situated in a quiet corner. Bee hotels should be installed against a sunny south-facing brick wall, at waist height.



Here are some instructions about how to build a bee hotel or a hedgehog hideaway

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-make-bee-hotel>

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/how-to-make-bee-hotel.html>

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-hedgehog-home>

And a simpler versions here

<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/how-to-make-a-hedgehog-house.html>

<https://ptes.org/my-garden/how-to-build-a-hedgehog-house/>

Nest boxes

Buy or make a spacious, good quality box – avoid any small boxes made of thin wood, plastic or metal. A perch below the entrance can assist predators rather than the birds, so this is not recommended.

Choosing the right spot is crucial:

- Make sure there is an unobstructed flight path to the entrance of the nest box.
- Make sure there are perches and areas of foliage for cover nearby.
- Fix the box at a good height, out of reach of predators. If you do not need a ladder, you are installing the box too low!
- Most species of bird are territorial, so avoid too many nest boxes in one area.



Specialist larger nest boxes, such as Owl boxes and Swift boxes, may require a faculty. However, you will find that your local bird club will offer enthusiastic help. The Swift Conservation website is a useful resource – urban churches are often well-suited to attract this charismatic – and sadly declining – species!

<https://www.swift-conservation.org/>

Birdbath

Last but not least, make sure there is a source of fresh and clean water available. Especially in summer, a simple bowl of water could be a lifeline for hedgehogs and other wildlife. See the Create activity below.

TAKE FIVE



1. CONNECT

Sanctuary

The concept of Sanctuary is linked through history to the church because of the protection that churches offered to those who were fleeing danger. The idea of Sanctuary may however take on a new meaning for us as the climate warms. During the heatwave in July 2022, many churches opened their doors to offer 'cool space'. St Luke's, West Holloway, in north London, served iced drinks and provided free wi-fi to those in need of shelter. The Vicar, the Revd John MacKenzie, said: "We've been delighted to open the doors to welcome our neighbours and offer those just passing by some coolness in these oppressively hot times. The climate emergency is real, and is happening now, with record temperatures across England and Wales and much of the world as well."⁵

Offering welcome

Churches have also often been at the forefront of local response to flooding, wildfires and other disasters. Churches may also be called upon to offer 'warm spaces' in the winter. It helps if churches can make an emergency response

plan before disasters hit – not just as a practical exercise, but also as a spiritual exercise. As we think about climate resilience, we recognise the fragility of the security we enjoy. Whilst this may seem hypothetical, climate breakdown will accelerate the number and intensity of extreme weather events and whilst we may hope and pray for different futures and commit our energy to transforming the way we live, we will almost inevitably be called upon to offer help to our neighbours.

You might like to consider how you can open your church to offer sanctuary in your community in times of need. You could open your church as a heatbank in times of fuel crisis – a welcoming place where people can find warmth and shelter when they are struggling to heat their homes and meet the costs of their energy bills. Conversely, you could open your church as a cool spot in times of heatwave and oppressive summer conditions.

2. CONTEMPLATE

Circle of belonging

In the icon written by Andrei Rublev referred to above, three figures are seated around a table. They are bound together by the loving gaze that flows from one to another around the circle. The individual differences in appearance indicate



the three individuated persons and the silent attentiveness with which each holds the other suggests an indivisible link between the persons. It is almost like a dance. Trinity Sunday invites us to contemplate the communion at the heart of God and asks us to step into the love that flows between the persons of the Trinity. You will see when you look at the image that the circle is not closed. There is a space at the front into which we are invited. In daily life, we are very good at creating closed circles. God asks us to participate in his life and to extend generous welcome to all. At this time in the church year, it is good to reflect on and renew the ties that bind us together in households in church communities and with our local communities.

The circle of belonging also extend outwards to our neighbours across the globe, especially those who are most impacted by the problems that we have some responsibility for creating, and to all living things with whom we share a common home. It is however easy to forget our interconnectedness.

We live on this planet in an ecological community which includes all living things and all of humanity. If we are to live out the movement of the community of God in the Trinity then we cannot close our ears to the cry of people of Global Majority Heritage and of the Global South. We cannot close

our ears to the crashing of felled trees thousands of miles away. We cannot close our ears to the creaking of the ice as it breaks into pieces and falls into the sea. We cannot close our ears to the cry of the displaced and the climate refugees. We cannot close our ears to the call for justice and the cry for the healing of our planet. The love at the heart of the Trinity turns us outwards to the needs of the world. God as community invites us in to contemplate all that has been created and gifted to us as human beings. God as community then sends us out to bring love to every creature and every place.

If we are to tackle the massive challenges we face we will need to work together, share resources and expertise and find common solutions. Why not organise a discussion on how churches might work together on environmental issues?

3. CREATE

Plant pot birdbath

Make a birdbath and consider how to provide water for animals and birds especially in the hot days of summer.

You can make a simple birdbath quite using materials that are easy to find.

You will need: three clay flower pots: 12", 10" and an 8"; a large



terracotta saucer that will sit on the top of the birdbath when it is constructed; acrylic paint that is not harmful to wildlife; suitable glue.

Paint the flower pots and the saucer. Position the birdbath out of direct sunlight and away from areas which would put visiting birds at risk from predators. Turn the flower pots upside down and starting with the largest stack them one on top of each other. Glue the saucer in place. Position a flat stone in the centre for birds to land on. Fill the saucer. The ideal depth is around 2 inches. Enjoy watching the birds landing in the birdbath and see how many different birds visit. Change the water regularly.

You can also make the birdbath by using just the terracotta saucer as the bath without a supporting base. Some people have also used an upturned dustbin lid. Make sure the water is at the optimum depth of around 2 inches.

4. REFLECT

Wild Places for Prayer

Jesus would often withdraw to the erémos places to pray. (e.g. Luke 5.16) The Greek word erémos means solitary, lonely, desolate, barren, uninhabited. When the word is used to describe a place, it is usually translated as 'wilderness' or 'desert'. Why did Jesus



choose to go to the countryside, rather than a quiet corner of the Synagogue or the Temple to pray?

Wendell Berry reflects that 'There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places.'⁶ The wilderness may be devoid of human life, but not of divine life. It is in these solitary places that we meet one-to-one with our Creator. In the Celtic tradition these places are called 'thin'; here the barrier between heaven and earth is translucent, and here we feel God's holy presence near us. 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.'⁷

Inhospitable places remind us of some important truths about ourselves. First of all, we are fragile creatures, and like all other creatures, we rely on God's providence and sustenance. Secondly, we are not the only creatures God created, and nor are we at the centre of all things – God is. Other creatures are important to God, and God cares for them too. It is the God of all 'Who makes the rain fall on barren land, in a desert where no one lives?'⁸

'Yet these limits [to humanity] are not cause for sorrow or despair; on the contrary, they are a cause for celebration. [...] For the same God whose power is seen so dramatically in creation is also powerful enough to save and redeem'⁹

Can you carve out some time this week to take a walk into the wilderness, and let yourself be exposed to the grandeur of the created world, as well as to the loving care of your Creator?

If you are planning a holiday this summer, can you set one day aside for prayer?

5. RESPOND

Preserving the wilderness



As the world population almost reaches 8 billion, it is perhaps unsurprising that there are signs of human life almost everywhere we go. It can be

difficult to find a spot away from the noise of traffic, the presence of litter, and the vapour trails of aircraft in the sky.

It is important for all of us to have access to green spaces. Parks and nature reserves need to be expertly managed to balance the needs of wildlife and humans. But it is also important to remember that creation does not exist only for us. We are not the only inhabitants of this planet. God has allocated space for all other creatures, even for sea monsters (Psalm 104:26). The wild animals and deserted places fulfil their function, glorifying the Creator by simply being what they are.

We are not the owners of the earth. God says: 'For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine. [...] The world and all that is in it is mine.'¹⁰ Sometimes it may be best for us to restrict our access to nature, in order to secure unspoilt habitat where other creatures can flourish. This way, existing wild places can be preserved, and in some cases restored, by letting other creatures take the lead through a process of rewilding.

Please remember conservation organisations in your prayers and charitable giving. Perhaps you could invite a speaker and organise a coffee morning in aid of a local conservation project?



WORSHIP FOR TRINITY:

A Service of the Word

This Service of the Word brings together the theme of creation and Trinity. It includes a trinitarian creation hymn set to the tune of *Morning has Broken*:

God of creation, Gentle life giver

to the tune Bunesan (Morning has broken)

God of Creation
Gentle life-giver
Present at birth, and
all through our days
Author of sunrise
Song in the night sky
Here in this place, we
offer our praise

Jesus, Companion
teacher and healer
friend of the grieving,
suffering, the poor
Stand with your people
whisper among us
promise of mercy
goodness for all.

Spirit of Comfort
blow through Creation
stir up new life, breathe
peace through our world
Healer of hearts, and
hope for tomorrow
weave all our sorrows
into new dawn

Here we give thanks for
life in its fullness
blessings received
your gifts to us all
Make us a people
filled with compassion
selflessly giving
serving your world

Craig Mitchell, 2010. May be copied for non-commercial use with attribution.

The full liturgy can be accessed here:

<https://sites.google.com/view/chooselifecreation>

¹ John 1: 1-2

² Acts 2:44-47

³ Henri J.M Nouwen "Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life," London: Fount Harper Collins, 1998), 49

⁴ Psalm 84:3

⁵ Joe Ware "Churches offer cool sanctuary in heatwave Britain," Church Times, 20 July 2022

⁶ Wendell Berry, "How to be a Poet," in Given: Poems, (Berkeley, USA: Counterpoint, 2006).

⁷ Genesis 28:16

⁸ Job 38:26

⁹ Douglas J Moo and Jonathan A Moo, "Creation Care: a Biblical theology of the natural world," (Grand Rapids: MI, Zondervan), 63.

¹⁰ Psalm 50:10-12

An abstract artwork featuring a background of swirling, textured blue and green colors. Overlaid on this background are several dark brown, branching lines that resemble tree limbs or veins, creating a complex, organic pattern. The overall effect is one of natural, organic growth and movement.

Creationtide:

Celebrating creation

Creationtide and the Trinitarian mystery

The Church of England marks Creationtide from 1st September to 4th October. For many church communities this period of time includes harvest celebrations and the Festivals of Holy Cross Day (14 September); Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist (21 September); and St Michael and All Angels (29 September). There are also several holy days in this time frame that are relevant to the themes and spirituality of Creationtide, including Hildegard Abbess of Bingen (1179) on 17th September and of course St Francis on 4th

October, which marks the end of this time of celebrating creation and responding to the challenges of caring for it. As a season, it brings together several creation themes. It is interesting to note that a day that draws us to focus on the cross is at the heart of these weeks, reminding us that the cross is indeed at the heart of the story of creation that we tell. Reflecting on the cross at the heart of all creation offers us a pathway into understanding some of the key ideas that this season is about. Radical inclusivity; radical generosity; radical transformation. However, the pattern and rhythm of creationtide is fundamentally Trinitarian in character, reminding us of the God who is relationship and who created all things for healthy and self-giving relationship.

Creation care in the lives of Hildegard of Bingen and St Francis

Hildegard of Bingen had a deep reverence for nature and God's creative power: 'Every creature is a glittering, glistening mirror of divinity.' She saw the gifting of God in every living thing and God's sustaining power in the beauty of the Earth and in the eternal movement of the cosmos itself, writing: 'Creation is the song of God'. She understood the relationship between human beings and creation as one of






interdependence but with a stronger responsibility resting on humans to ensure that what they choose does not harm this balance: 'The Earth which sustains humanity must not be injured; it must not be destroyed'. Outspoken and courageous, she challenged the prevailing attitude of materialism amongst the powerful, including the leaders of the church. 'Earth is the treasury for all who live in it' but we have a responsibility to live in ways that do not endanger the wellbeing of the people and of all life on the planet. Her example teaches us to be brave enough to speak up to defend our planet, and bold enough to challenge the behaviours and beliefs that undermine the delicate balance of life on Earth.

St Francis is well known for his sermons to animals and for his vision that all animals were equal with humans in their value as part of the created order. Creation, in

his view, is a gift of God's love and can be for us a window into the new creation. Rather than a secular environmentalism this is a thoroughly biblical, hands on and childlike wonder at the gifts that God has given us in creation and a challenge to us to care for all created things. It is a spirituality born in wonder and nurtured in everyday encounter with the textures, features and contours of all created things. Most of us know St Francis through his much loved and well known 'Canticle of the Sun' and the hymn 'All creatures of our God and King' – both of which are full of thanksgiving for all the wonders of creation. But if we are truly to enter into the challenge and charism that consideration of St Francis offers us, we need to get beyond the bunnies and out of twee, sentimental interpretations of the story, recognising the call to simplicity that challenges us to limit our desire to accrue more and more, and to learn the true value of contentment.

The call to counter-cultural living

The life of St Francis points us to a simpler, humbler and kinder way of living in the world – a counter-cultural life of radical poverty that is full of trust in God. St Francis made the human Jesus his life focus – remembering that God in Christ made a humble home within creation and with



humankind. When our lives are so full of things and our time so full of activity, the story of St Francis invites us to ponder again the simplicity of the Christ child who shows us the heart of God and the mystery of the self-giving, dynamic love that flows between the persons of the Trinity and that reaches out to embrace the world.

This aspect of the life and spirituality of St Francis deserves to be better taught to all ages. It points us as individual Christians and as Christian communities to live simply and to teach everyone about the loving provision of God seen in the gifts that surround us – gifts that flow out from God’s self-giving love at the heart of the Trinitarian relationship and shine out through the natural resources and the creatures that inhabit the world. Indeed, St Francis saw creation as God’s living book, full of awe and wonder, through which God speaks and reveals to us God’s own infinite beauty and goodness. God invites us into a joyful mystery to contemplate his wonders and to respond with praise.

Reassessing our priorities

The life of St Francis invites us to consider the simple things in life and what ‘enough’ might look like in a world where our focus is often on bigger, better and newer and to recognise that if we are to truly walk lightly on the Earth, we have

to learn to live more sustainably. Part of this is reflecting on what it means to live in community – to share our space and our resources with others. In the book of Acts, living with all things in common bears witness to the God whose gifts are meant to be shared so that all can flourish.

We are living in times when material security and prosperity are not guaranteed even in the relatively affluent developed world. Climate change comes with high costs to all. In times of recession and spiralling costs this may become a sacrificial calling as we are invited to review our priorities and renew our thankfulness for God’s provision and then to think how we can use the possessions and resources we do have to benefit others, so that their lives are enhanced. All of us need to consider how we might travel more lightly and free ourselves up in order to give more generously. This may include freeing up bandwidth for ourselves so that we can deepen habits that enhance creation care and so that we can offer our time to God as a gift through which others can be blessed. This is particularly true for those in ministry, often burdened by administration and new initiatives. Perhaps we need to refocus on the call to simplicity in how we organise ourselves so that we can find more joy and freedom in our work and

ministry. The Bible is full of stories where God does more with less – feasts from meagre offerings; a widow's mite that in its sacrificial generosity becomes the greatest gift; wonderful things from tiny beginnings. How might these and other stories of God's blessings out of apparent scarcity encourage us towards more faithful habits of simple living that lead us towards ever more generous giving?

Simple living

We are reminded by St Francis and his writings that God pours out his love for us in creation and supremely in Christ incarnate. In creation, God chooses to form earth from nothing and to form us for relationship. The invitation into the dance of divine love that is constantly poured out in the Trinity

is a hallmark of the understanding that St Francis had of God's eternal, abiding and dynamic love.

'Canticle of the Creatures' communicates an almost childlike wonder which is the essence of Franciscan spirituality and which offers a counterbalance to our lives in the world where we have lost our connection to the interdependence that holds all living things together. 'Fear and honour, praise and consecrate, thank and adore the omnipotent Lord God in the Trinity and in the unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creator of all the things'. (Rnb 21, 2:FF 55).

Behind the altar in the Chapel of the Franciscan Friary in Alnmouth, Northumberland, is a plain glass window through which, as the seasons turn, the natural world



beckons and the trees, plants and sky open out in front of you. In the distance is the open sea, full of promise, risk and adventure. It is a fabulous glimpse of the call at the end of the Eucharist to 'go in peace to love and serve the Lord.' Our task is to live out our Eucharistic remembering in every season and in every place, in the simple fabric of our lives, by acts of reconciliation and by living in simplicity on the Earth that God has made.



Prayer

God of life

You have created a world of beauty and splendour.

Your love has called into being worlds beyond our imagining life in all its diversity and our big and beautiful blue planet – space for us to live in and a world of treasures for us to share.

Teach us to see your love for all living things from the greatest to the smallest

and show us how to treat your world with kindness knowing that all these gifts come from you.

May we live humbly and wisely on the earth;

may we walk in peace with our neighbours;

may we trust in your goodness

and share our resources with generosity.

Strengthen us by your Spirit

to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord,

to travel faithfully and to walk lightly where your Spirit leads us

and to live with simplicity in the world that you have made.

Amen.

TO PONDER

What steps can you take towards living more simply?





TAKE ONE

Become an Eco Church

Of all the different actions suggested in this book, joining the Eco Church journey may well prove to be the most fruitful one. Eco Church is an interdenominational Christian environmental awards scheme for churches, run by A Rocha UK.

Eco Church helps you record and celebrate the environmental activities of your church. The scheme provides tools and ideas to help churches respond to environmental issues in worship and teaching, management of church buildings and land, community engagement and lifestyle.

How to start the journey?

The first step on the Eco Church journey is to register your church(es) on the Eco Church website.

As soon as you have done this, you are able to complete a detailed survey for each of your churches. It may be helpful to do this together with a few people who know the church and the buildings well, such as the churchwardens. The survey saves automatically, so you can

complete it in stages in your own time.

The process of completing the survey will give you lots of practical ideas and suggestions for making creation care and integral part of your church life. Simple actions such as praying for environmental causes, twinning your toilets, championing local and Fairtrade produce, or holding



a Harvest Festival will give you points that count towards gaining an Eco Church award. The point thresholds are 25% for a bronze, 50% for a silver and 75% for a gold award.

Each of the Church of England dioceses is registered as Eco Diocese. The more churches gain Eco Church awards, the more likely it is that your diocese will gain an Eco Diocese award. Contact your Diocesan Environment Officer for more information.

Think about how to include children and young people in this activity and how to communicate with children's groups and youth groups about how the church is planning to work towards their eco awards. Some children and young people will already be involved in activism and leadership on green issues in their school communities.



TAKE FIVE



1. CONNECT

Make meat optional at Harvest Supper

Meat consumption is a thorny and divisive issue. Even though meat alternatives have improved dramatically, many people are

unwilling to 'give up' meat entirely. However, the fact remains that meat is a very 'inefficient' food source. It requires more energy, water and land to produce meat than any other food source. Meat production accounts for nearly 60% of all greenhouse gases from food production worldwide!

Not all meat products are equally damaging to the environment. Red meats such as beef are generally worst, but much less so if they are locally farmed. Another benefit of locally farmed meat may be that you can have a better

insight in the quality of life the animals experience.

Sarx is UK-based Christian animal welfare charity that makes a strong case for changing our diets. Their website is worth exploring and contains thought-provoking lectures by leading theologians, addressing the huge ethical issues surrounding the consumption of animal products. It makes you wonder, do we really want to celebrate the blessings of the Harvest by willfully harming God's creation and contributing to animal cruelty?

One way of addressing these moral dilemmas is to offer a LOAF Harvest meal:

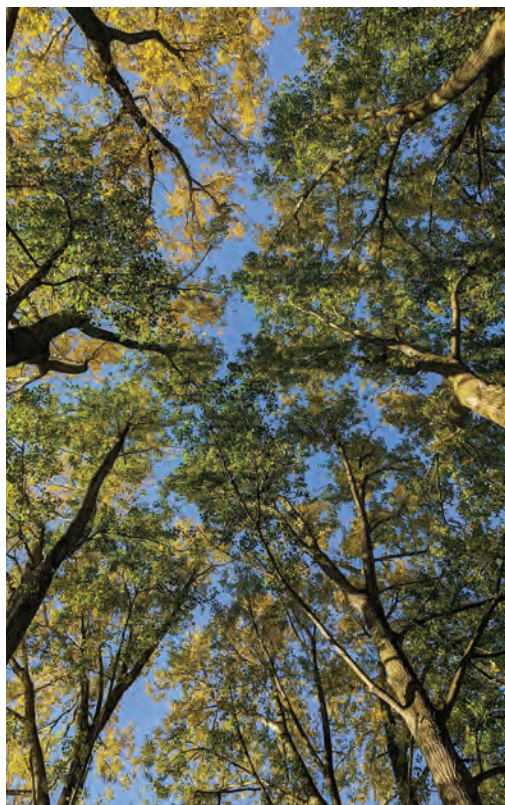
- Locally produced
- Organically grown
- Animal friendly
- Fairly traded

You can read more about the LOAF principles, and find more ideas and liturgies for your Harvest celebration, on this section of the website of Green Christian: <https://greenchristian.org.uk/harvest/>


2. CONTEMPLATE

Awe walks

We all need more awe and wonder in our lives! Experiencing awe and wonder can challenge and change the way we see ourselves and the way we understand our place in creation. Some scientists



argue that it can even make us more humble.⁵ The good news is that we don't need to travel to vast open spaces or the Grand Canyon to experience awe but we do need to give ourselves time to become immersed in nature and to pay attention. During lockdown, many of us made time and space to stop and take notice of small things on our daily walks. We noticed small signs of hope as trees came into leaf and as hedgerows came alive with hopping and swooping birds. We noticed the seasonal changes. It is a good habit to hold onto.



There are everyday miracles to see if we can set time aside. Take some time to consider the lilies; the birds of the air; the earth, stones and ground upon which you walk. Be thankful for what beauty you find and be aware of the things around you that are not beautiful and that require care or restoration.

Two performance pieces that are inspiring for all ages

The Lark Ascending by Ralph Vaughan Williams is a beautiful piece of music based on the flight and song of the skylark which was the common soundtrack of the countryside at the time the music was written. Today skylarks and their song are rapidly becoming a sound of the past and the RSPB has calculated that the skylark population has halved since 1980.

The Lark Descending is a fascinating programme on BBC Sounds Between the Ears. It includes birdsong and some imaginative reinterpretation of the song of the skylark and the danger that faces this bird (and many others) as a result of the crisis in the environment and the destruction of nature. Read about it on the following page which also includes a performance of The Lark Ascending by Nicola Benedetti.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1fLktpSjyxDjq8SrSJ8vcND/the-lark-descending>

3. CREATE

Stained glass art

Create a 'stained glass window' based on creation themes.



There are many different ways in which you can create a faux stained glass window and there is plenty of guidance online.

Principles include:

1. Explore some art that will give you inspiration, for example Matisse stained glass window designs offer some iconic shapes and patterns; Mondrian explores geometric shapes and blocks of colour; John Piper has created many examples of modern stained glass. There are also inspiring examples of modern stained glass window design in cathedrals across the county e.g Coventry Cathedral Baptistry Window; Chichester Cathedral the Chagall Window (based around Psalm 150); Derby Cathedral All Souls window; Manchester Cathedral Healing Window; Norwich Cathedral McLean windows and so many more. Explore the designs of windows in your own church if there are any.
2. Choose a simple design. You could focus on one day of the creation story in Genesis 1 or take one aspect of creation e.g. sun and moon; stars; water; fish; bird wings; leaves;

flowers. You could also create a design around a basic shape such as rectangles of colour or circles. Go for clear shapes and strong outlines and focus on central shapes without overcomplicating the design.

3. Do the initial design work on paper until you are satisfied with the result.
4. Make the body of the picture from tracing paper. A4 or A5.
5. Copy the design by laying the tracing paper over the design you have completed.
6. Cut tissue paper into small squares rectangles triangles and uses these to make the shape of your design on tracing paper.
7. Cut tissue paper into small squares rectangles triangles and uses these to make the shape of your design on tracing paper. Use these to fill the body of the design making sure you do not go over the edges of the outline.
8. (Instead of designing a window with shapes you could simply overlap tissues paper shapes to fill the page, giving the idea of small shapes of glass in stained glass windows).
9. Create a frame from strips of black paper and glue around the edges of the 'window'.
10. Leave to dry then place against a light source and enjoy.



Artwork by Yiska Nobel, aged 8

There are many different ways in which you can create a 'stained glass window.' Video tutorials and guidance are widely available on the internet. You might need to consider how to create using environmentally friendly materials.

4. REFLECT

Poetry Day

In the first week of October, we celebrate National Poetry Day. Poetry can inspire us by describing the beauty of nature or landscapes





and helping us to see the details of creatures in new ways. Reading nature poetry can be a wonderful consolation when everything seems dark. Poetry can also lift our spirits by helping us to imagine the beauty that we could so easily lose, and firing us into action once more. National Poetry Day offers an opportunity to explore some poems that focus on creation care nature and environmental themes. Invite people to find their favourite poem about any aspect of nature and its creatures. Organise a poetry reading evening – this could include lyrics from songs and some hymns as well as classic poetry. Encourage people to learn poems or the words of songs off by heart. Some could be performed or sung during the evening.

The following poems work with all age groups and there are some activities suggested for use in school settings that can be adapted to use with children's groups in church.

Dreamer by Brian Moses⁶ This poem is offered for use within the Primary curriculum but it works well with intergenerational groups and with children's groups. As Christians we need to be able to imagine the world we want to see before we can work to bring it into being. That is why the Bible is so full of visions of the future of a world where the upside down values of the kingdom of God

inspire us to work for a more just and equal society where the last are first and the littlest and the least become the greatest.

Here's another of his poems – this one also works with multiple age groups:

Instead by Brian Moses.⁷

This poem can also be used in discussion on the negative aspects of social media and computers, and how they might prevent us from engaging with nature.

Ark by Simon Armitage (suitable for KS3/4 in schools and also for intergenerational groups)⁸

This poem explores the depth of the crisis we are in and has links to the story of Noah in Genesis Chapter 8.


The National Trust has published a wonderful collection of 365 nature poems for children: *I am the Seed that Grew the Tree*. It is an impressively wide-ranging collection with glorious illustrations by Frann Preston-Gannon.⁹

5. RESPOND

Join the Great Big Green Week

The Great Big Green Week is held annually in September and during Creationtide. It is the UK's biggest celebration of community action to tackle climate change and protect nature.





In recent years, the Great Big Green Week saw bat walks and bake offs, festivals and football matches, murals and MPs in EVs, seaweed foraging and school assemblies. These events were hosted by teachers, sport clubs, artists, places of worship – anyone who cares about climate change.

Find out what is going on near you. More importantly, join in. Churches can apply for funding to help with Great Big Green Week events. Grants range between £200 to £10,000. More information can be found on the Great Big Green Week website <https://greatbiggreenweek.com>

October 1-31 Black History Month in the United Kingdom February 1- 28/9 Black History Month in the United States¹




Living justly

As Christians, we cannot ignore the call to work for justice as we face the challenges of addressing climate change impacts. Black History month is marked at two different times October in the UK and February in the USA. February sees the anniversary of the birth two figures whose lives impacted Black history: Abraham Lincoln (February 12) and Frederick Douglass (February 14). In the Church, some of this month usually overlaps with the weeks of Lent. During this time the Lenten disciplines of prayer and study and the Lenten practices of limiting our own choices and lifestyles for the greater good of others seems to hold a connection with the call for justice that Black History turns our attention towards. The Church

of England marks Black History Month in October and there is some overlap between it and the season of creation, which gives us an opportunity to reflect on how the biblical call to 'live justly' intersects with issues of racism and the disproportionate impacts of climate change across the globe and on the ways in which our own consumption can drive injustices in communities across the planet.

Structural injustices and the impacts of climate change

Climate change disproportionately affects black people, indigenous peoples and people of colour across the globe because of historic and structural injustices. Climate change also exacerbates and amplifies existing inequality. Many scientists, racial justice advocates




and environmentalists now agree that 'the best way to overcome the climate crisis is by empowering and listening to indigenous communities'.² The extent and severity of extreme weather events is increasing worldwide but the developing world in the Global South is experiencing a higher number of these events. People who live in the Global South are much less likely to have contributed to the problem. Researchers from Oxfam have discovered that someone in the UK will take just five days to emit the same amount of carbon emissions as someone in Rwanda does in an entire year. By 12 January of every year, the average Brit's emissions will have overtaken the annual per capita emissions of a further six African countries: Malawi, Ethiopia, Uganda, Madagascar, Guinea and Burkina Faso.³ In fact, some statistics illustrate that the majority of high-income nations have already exceeded their share of the carbon budgets that are devised to limit global warming to 2 degrees. In a few years time from now, if no drastic changes are made to our carbon emissions, Tuvalu will vanish from the face of the globe and will sink beneath the ocean. Tuvalu emits less than 0.03% of global emissions. The average carbon footprints in Zambia are very low at 0.06 tonnes which is less than one tenth of the UK average. Yet Zambia is facing environmental disaster, including a drought in 2021 that led to over

1 million people needing food assistance.⁴

Here in the UK, we need a wider focus than our domestic policies and concerns. All of humanity is affected by what happens in one area of the globe. We also need to work for a climate mitigation fund such as the Green Climate Fund. The energy crisis in the UK and many countries in Europe has faced us to confront our dependence on gas. However, some of the answers currently being proposed are likely to make matters worse in the limited time we have left to tackle the issues. The fact that we are reluctant to limit our drive for endless growth, even if it is at the expense of the Global South, tells us that we have a long way to go before we can truly place racial justice at the heart of all that we do.

Fossil fuels and racism

The burning of fossil fuels whilst providing a ready supply of energy to the developed world is causing climate breakdown and climate destruction. This is causing a public health crisis where the lives and wellbeing of black, brown, indigenous and poor communities is being disproportionately endangered. In South Texas, wastewater from fracking wells and oil and gas flares cause harm to Latinx communities and in other areas of the globe, the impacts of coal gas and oil production damage farmland and the ability of families to sustain themselves



or to make a living. Race, rather than income or class, is most likely to affect the location of polluting industry or of dumping grounds for toxic waste products. Indeed some critics have observed that the climate crisis would be more easily contained if it were not for structural forms of racism that have led to the dehumanising of some of humanity, making it easier for fossil fuel companies to persist in creating a web of lies about the destruction that burning of oil and gas causes. History tells us that colonialism and the drive for consumption of resources that it fuelled has led us to a transactional relationship with nature. Every resource that nature can provide can become a commodity to be sold or bought on world markets at the expense of the future. Our relationship with nature itself needs to change for these historic injustices to be addressed.

Voice and agency

Perhaps it is a sense of collective guilt that drives many people to become climate activists and to

speak out against some of the excesses that have led to some occupying a privileged position leaving others in peril. The choices of those in the developed world have often inhibited the flourishing of those in the developing world. Some people have also argued that the face of climate activism is often white and that we sometimes ignore the variety of human experiences that are involved and we do not always give comparable weight to voices of the people who are most affected. Even at COP26, most of the spokespeople were white although it is people of colour whose voices and experiences need to be at the centre of our plans and our actions. Racial diversity matters here just as much as it does in every area of our life together in community. There has to be a concerted effort amongst Christian communities to give all people voice and agency so that we can together ensure that the climate movement itself becomes truly diverse, reflecting the diversity and inclusion that is God's vision for human life on earth.

TO PONDER

Given that developed countries have made a bigger contribution to emissions but the impact will disproportionately affect those in the Global South, how can the developed world offer support or funding to communities in the Global South?

Worship and Action for Black History Month

Pray for the work of black environmentalists and black climate activists. Seek justice for the Global South and consider how we, in developed countries, need to offer what we can to places and people most affected by our emissions.

Read about black heroes of the environmental movement here
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/02/black-environmentalists-justice-climate-change/>

Here is some information about 11 black climate activists we should all know about
<https://ecologycenter.org/blog/11-black-climate-activists-you-should-know-and-support/>

You can find some information about how racial justice and climate justice intersect here:
<https://climateanalytics.org/blog/2020/black-lives-matter-the-link-between-climate-change-and-racial-justice/>

<https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/watch-is-climate-change-racist/>

¹ Sometimes referred to as National Afro-American (Black) History Month or National African American History Month.

² Global Citizen website <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/why-is-climate-change-a-racial-justice-issue/> Accessed on 14/09/22

³ Source: Greenpeace website 02/01/22 <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/watch-is-climate-change-racist/> Accessed on 14/09/22

⁴ Jeremy Williams, "Why climate change is inherently racist," 27 January 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20220125-why-climate-change-is-inherently-racist> Accessed on 14/09/22

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/sep/23/how-getting-more-awe-can-improve-your-life-and-even-make-you-a-nicer-person>

⁶ Brian Moses, 'Dreamer: Saving our Wild World' (London: Otter-Barry Books, 2018). <https://resources.collins.co.uk/free/Belair%20Creative/Dreamer%20Poems.pdf>

⁷ <https://nationalpoetryday.co.uk/poem/instead/>

⁸ <https://www.simonarmitage.com/wp-content/uploads/Amended-Ark.pdf>

⁹ Fiona Waters "I am the Seed that Grew the Tree: A Nature Poem for Every Day of the Year," London: Nosy Crow, 2018).



WORSHIP FOR CREATIONTIDE:

Harvest Thanksgiving

This interactive service celebrates the gift of the elements to sustain life on earth. It makes a link between the tree in the Garden of Eden and the tree with leaves 'for the healing of the nations' in another garden at the end of time. In the middle stands the tree of crucifixion which makes the new creation possible. Parts of this service could be adapted to celebrate the planting of a tree at any time of the year.

A red ribbon is placed around the branches of the tree.

Voice 1 God's love for us and for all the world
weaves through creation like a red thread

Voice 2 God's love surrounds the earth
and is his everlasting gift to us all.
It wraps around us in our fear and our hope
it surrounds us when we are in darkness
and when we are in light;
in seasons of plenty and times of joy
and in quiet and lonely places when we feel afraid.

Voice 1 God offers us his love
when things are going well and
when everything has gone wrong.

Voice 2 God's love is a red thread
that weaves through the story of God's people:
it weaves around us and between us;
a red thread that marks the pathway to life.

Voice 1 It is the same love that is shown to us on another tree
on a hill a long way away
It is the love that walks with us
when we are happy and when we are sad.

Voice 2 It is the love that will find us
and bring us home.

Voice 1 It is the love of God, stronger than death
that makes all things new.

Voice 2 God's love in Jesus is the greatest gift of all.

Leader The Spirit of God breathes through all creation
bringing new life to birth.

SILENCE

Leader May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: **Amen**

The full print friendly liturgy can be accessed here:
<https://sites.google.com/view/chooselifecreation>

Christ the King:

The cost of leadership



Contrasting images of power

The readings for this Sunday take us to the heart of the story of Jesus – its end and its beginning – and challenge us to shape our own lives around his story of humility and the rejection of worldly power and status. In terms of creation care, we are also challenged about ways of speaking truth to power if we are to stand a chance of limiting global heating to 1.5 degrees.

This day is a celebration of Christ as glorified Lord and we are reminded of the end of all things in images of Christ as judge of all and as victorious king in splendour and majesty. But in the lectionary scriptures that are read on this day, we also see Christ as the mocked and reviled man of sorrows – the one who came to live among us and the one who is rejected by his own. And so, individually and together, we are asked to gaze on Christ victorious but also on Christ humiliated.



The story of the Good Shepherd also runs through the images in the readings for Christ the King. There are many references to sheep and their waywardness and also to the shepherd who is so necessary to the well being and guidance of the sheep. We are reminded of the qualities necessary in a good leader:



staying power; determination; compassion; vision and courage. The good leader is the one who will lay down his or her life for the sheep. It is not even because the sheep are particularly lovely. It is because a good shepherd recognises the responsibility that goes with being a true leader: in all weathers and in sorrow as well as joy. It is faithful giving of self in order to save the sheep that marks

out the good shepherd from the hired hand. Through the cost and the agony of true leadership we see the heart of God the creator and protector of all creation and we too are promised protection and care: 'I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed... says the Lord'.¹ But there is also a warning of woe for those who scatter the sheep.

The king who suffers

Luke 23:33-43, the gospel reading in Year C, offers us a clear image of Christ as a leader of an entirely different kind – one who suffers and dies for us for us and who bears pain on our behalf. Year A offers us a beautiful Old Testament passage from Ezekiel 34 to ponder, with its exploration of the kind of kingship that does not mimic the leadership of our world but instead reveals the compassionate and sacrificial kingship of Christ. God tells the prophet that on account of the failure of worldly leadership, he himself would step in to shepherd the people.

I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out...I will feed them...I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured...I will feed them with justice.²

The gospel reading in Year A is from Matthew and it paints a familiar yet still challenging

story of the sheep and the goats. Perhaps it is not too far off the mark to consider that what we have chosen to do to protect the precious gift of the Earth that God has given us will be part of the way we are seen to have served God or not?

In Year B, we are given two completely contrasting ideas about kingship. The passage from Daniel is full of mystery and magnificence: robes white as snow; a stream of fire and the clouds of heaven. These themes are picked up in the reading from Revelation: 'Look! He is coming with the clouds...'³ The gospel provides a balance to this, with an exploration of what kingship is and the assertion that is 'not of this world' but represents entirely different values. This different view of leadership is made plain in a spiritual sense when Jesus tells Pilate: 'my kingdom is not from here'.⁴ If we are to live by the values of the true king that we serve then we can do no better than to refer to Psalm 132, where a sign of God's blessing is shown in satisfying the poor with bread.⁵ Serving the king who suffers for the sake of the lost, we are called to go and do likewise: feeding the poor and answering the cry of all who are in need. The cries of those in need are going to become more and more insistent as the climate crisis takes hold.



The life of a shepherd

In John's gospel, Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd – the one who in contrast to other kinds of shepherd, knows the sheep by name, lays down his life for the sheep and offers them life in all its fullness. The good shepherd offers us care that is intimate, costly and incarnated in the very messy reality of our lives. Psalm 23 is probably one of the best known and most loved of the Psalms. The image of the shepherd was a very familiar one in ancient middle eastern culture. It occurs frequently in the Old Testament as an image for the care and protection of God and the image of Jesus as the good shepherd was precious to the early Christians.

However, Jesus as the good shepherd often becomes a bit sanitised in our heads. The life of an actual shepherd is a lot more

earthy, dirty and gutsy. We have become a bit more aware of this messy reality through books by Amanda Owen, (known as the Yorkshire Shepherdess), and James Rebanks. In his book, 'The life of a Shepherd' James Rebanks talks movingly of the cost of his way of life and of the intimate way in which he is bound to the sheep for whom he cares. He writes: 'when I leave my flock in the fells, and come down home, I leave something of myself up there with them...so I look away to the skyline where they graze several times a day. Sometimes I can't help myself, and go back up to the fell just to see that all is well'. Being a shepherd is bound tightly to the care of the sheep in all weathers, to the basics of life and death; to looking after sheep in the cold light of early dawn and in the depths of winter, it is intimate,

costly (sacrificial even) and – as he also describes in the book – often very messy ‘where you slather, slip and slide about in mud and there are not enough hours of daylight to get all your jobs done.’⁶ As he writes, the first rule of shepherding is “it’s not about you, it’s about the sheep.”⁷

Holding power to account

What kind of leaders do we need to support our creation care? We need leaders to cry out on behalf of our beloved planet – people who can ensure that we are shepherded into the right ways of living and into the right pathways that lead to life. Not life for our own selfish ends, but life abundant for every creature and every person on the earth. We look to our ministers in government and are led to ponder the problem of self interest that

compromises bold and visionary leadership. In our churches we need people who can point us towards God’s prophetic vision of shepherd leaders who will lay down their lives for the sheep and leaders who will answer the call.

For many people on this planet, life in all its fullness a distant dream. It may feel like that for us all, some of the time and we would probably all too often settle for life in all its normality. The pandemic faced us all with big questions about mission and ministry; about how we connect to one another and about where we find our comfort in challenging or even life threatening situations. We are urged to be more ambitious in seeking life and in offering life to others. We are urged to act in ways that are life giving to other people and to the planet



itself. We should feel compelled to limit our own choices so that others can flourish. More than this, we are called to challenge the use of power that damages the wellbeing of the planet and the flourishing of all its inhabitants.

Our refuge in God

Scripture reminds us that God is in the midst of the city and although 'the nations are in uproar, the kingdoms totter,'⁸ God himself is our refuge. It is time for us to

renew our trust in the God who provides for us and is present for us in the midst of the pain and difficulty of now; who hears the voices of all those who lack still water, good green grass and the resources that give abundant life and who then calls us out of our relative plenty to continue the work of seeking out the lost and lonely, of cherishing creation in the way that God intended and of ensuring that there is sufficient good green grass for all to share.

Prayer

God our shepherd
you lead us through the dark places in our lives
and bring us to the good green grass.
You supply all that we need
and comfort us with your presence always.
May we not take more than we need
may we not take at the expense of the earth or of other people
may we not take lightly our responsibilities
to protect the one planet home we have.
In the good soil of our faith and our hope,
plant a longing for your kingdom of justice and peace for all
so that every person can live in peace
and all creation can dwell in security on the good green earth.
Amen.

TO PONDER

What does climate leadership look like and in our creation care, how successful are we at 'challenging unjust structures' and holding those in power to account?



TAKE ONE

Get political! How can we engage with our local leaders and local councillors? Why not write to your MP on an environmental topic that concerns you – either local or national or invite your MP or local councillor(s) to speak to your Deanery?

Write to your MP

Hope for the Future is a climate charity which works to equip communities, groups and individuals across the country to communicate the urgency of climate change with their local politicians. They believe that, as constituents, one of the biggest things we can do to tackle climate change is engage with our local MPs.

The [website of Hope for the Future](#) provides training, and up-to-date templates of letters. They also provide the following tips:

- MPs are more likely to respond to emails sent to their constituency office rather than parliament.
- Try to avoid sending a blanket email that you haven't written – make sure you know what is written in your letter. Personal letters or emails are more likely to get a response.
- If you are struggling to get hold of your MP, try contacting a local councillor to ask to be put in touch.
- We often hear that MPs pay more attention to handwritten letters.

If individuals feel daunted by writing to their MP, it may be possible for the PCC to compose a letter which can be signed in person by members of the congregation after a church service.

Here is one of the templates provided by [Hope for the Future](#):

Your address

.....

DearMP Date

Begin your letter by introducing yourself. Introduce the topic of climate change and explain what interests and concerns you about it. You may wish to refer to a recent creation-focused service or event hosted by the church.

For example;

“I am writing to you regarding the Government’s commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. However, our rate of carbon emissions reductions suggests we are nowhere near meeting our climate change targets. The world is already 1 degree hotter than it was compared to pre-industrial times, and we are on course to be 1.5 degrees hotter by 2030. Furthermore, whilst the net zero commitment is to be welcomed, there is currently no road map for how we are going to achieve the level of carbon reductions necessary. I find this deeply concerning and wanted to write to you to express my support for any work that can be done to ramp up Britain’s response to this global challenge.”

You may wish to add some personal details into your letter, for example;

A personal experience you have had regarding climate change, such as the impact in a country you have visited.

You could talk about ways in which you feel climate change or a related issue affects you directly, such as air pollution, flooding or wildlife loss.

It is always good to tell your MP you appreciate their work on something – to set the tone for a constructive dialogue, even if you disagree on a lot of other areas.

You can find your MP’s previous voting record at www.theyworkforyou.com or visit their website to find out campaigns they have taken part in.

Ask your MP to take action. This could be on a local or national level. Try to make your ask personal; either to you, your MP or your local area. Some examples of what you might ask your MP to do are:

Address a local issue such as tree planting, poor air quality, fuel poverty, public transport, access to green spaces, cycle paths or new community energy projects. Have a look at our policy resources to find out more about climate change issues your MP can campaign on or bring up in Parliament.

Ask to meet with your MP to discuss these issues further. Hope for the Future will be able to provide you with any support or resources you might need in preparing for this.

I look forward to receiving your responses to these matters.

Yours sincerely

Your name

Worship and action for Christ the King

In many ways, leaders create the organisational culture for the people they lead. Leadership behaviour, values and commitments are often a good measure of the way the health of an organisation. There is clearly more to leadership than 'talking the talk'. Living by what we preach and 'walking the walk' is also necessary. At a Youth4Climate summit in Milan on 28 September 2021, Greta Thunberg had this to say to our world leaders:

"Build back better. Blah, blah, blah. Green economy. Blah blah blah. Net zero by 2050. Blah, blah, blah.... This is all we hear from our so-called leaders. Words that sound great but so far have not led to action. Our hopes and ambitions drown in their empty promises."¹⁰

We are so familiar with the cycle of promises being made one day and broken the next, when the harsh daylight of political expediency suddenly changes everything. The church is called to work on Mark of Mission 4: 'To seek to transform unjust structures of society' as well as Mark of Mission 5 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.' We are called to prophetic action and prophetic living, as well as to speaking out against all that harms our world. In our small way, we are also called to hold power to account. How might these particular Marks of Mission be reflected in Deanery and Diocesan plans and meetings and in our parish statements and five-year plans?

¹ Jeremiah 23:4

² Ezekiel 34:11; 15-16

³ Revelation 1:7

⁴ John 18:36

⁵ Psalm 132:16

⁶ James Rebanks, "The Shepherd's Life: A Tale of the Lake District," (London: Penguin Books, 2016), 203.

⁷ Rebanks, 2016, 201

⁸ Psalm 46.6 Year C

⁹ Church of England Mark of Mission 4

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/sep/28/blah-greta-thunberg-leaders-climate-crisis-co2-emissions>

Resources

This section includes a small sample of the wide range of creation care resources available. Further suggestions can be found here: <https://sites.google.com/view/chooselifecreation>.

Creation Care Theology

Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology, Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todds, 2010)

In this well-argued book, Bauckham considers the relationship of humans to the rest of creation. He argues that there is much more to the Bible's understanding of this relationship than the mandate of human dominion given in Genesis 1, which has too often been used as a justification for domination and exploitation of the earth's resources. In countering this, he considers other biblical perspectives, including the book of Job, the Psalms and the Gospels, and re-evaluates the biblical tradition of 'dominion', in favour of a 'community of creation'.

Dave Bookless, *Planetwise, Dare to Care for God's World* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008)

Dr Dave Bookless is Director of Theology at A Rocha UK, and has previously served A Rocha as international trustee, co-founder, and national director. This eminently readable book derives from personal experience, sound biblical theological reflection, and hope filled action.

Douglas Moo, and Jonathan Moo, *Creation Care, A Biblical Theology of the Natural World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018)

This book sits comfortably in the evangelical tradition. Christopher J. H. Wright writes: "Douglas and

Jonathan Moo seamlessly combine their biblical and scientific expertise to achieve two very important objectives. On the one hand, they argue a thorough biblical case for including God's creation within God's redemptive mission – that is, within the full biblical meaning of the gospel itself. The Bible has good news for all creation! [...] On the other hand, they provide abundant scientific evidence to refute the political and corporate myths that so-called "environmental issues" (like the impacts of climate change) are a "hoax" or still in scientific dispute, while calling us to a range of practical measures that will help us move (as this series intends) from biblical theology to life and its fundamental ethical choices."

Howard A. Snyder, and Joel Scandrett, *Salvation means Creation Healed, The Ecology of Sin and Grace: Overcoming the Divorce between Earth and Heaven* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011)

Like the previous book in this list, this book sits in the evangelical tradition. It addresses a very important topic: The Bible promises renewal for *all* creation. Snyder and Scandrett argue that for centuries this promise has been side-lined or misunderstood. The authors show that the Bible tells the story of the broken and restored relationship between God, people and land – not just God and people. Mike Slaughter writes: "In *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, Howard and Joel speak prophetic truth for Christ's Church, which continues to

be deceived by the sirens of Platonic idealism that separate matter and spirit into two different worlds. God is redeeming Creation.”

Ruth Valerio, *Saying Yes to Life* (London: SPCK, 2020)

The Archbishop of York’s 2020 Lent Book explores how the creation account in Genesis offers us an insight in the uniquely different way Christians relate to God and the world. Each of the well-researched chapters gives wide-ranging examples of how Climate Change affects both people and nature.

Liturgy and Prayer for Creation

Church of England, *A Time for Creation, Liturgical Resources for Creation and the Environment* (London: Church House Publishing, 2020)

This is a convenient compilation of creation-focussed materials drawn from Common Worship, available in print and online.

Rob Kelsey, *Praying for the Earth, Remembering the Environment in our Prayers of Intercession* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2021)

Kelsey’s collects for wide-ranging environmental topics can be used in suggested weekly and monthly cycles, or individually.

Nick Mayhem-Smith, with Sarah Brush, *Landscape Liturgies, Resources to celebrate and bless the earth* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2021)

This rich collection of liturgies and blessings draws from across the whole spectrum of Christian tradition and history and includes such diverse liturgies as an Anglo-Saxon blessing of apples, a Sea Sunday service, and Prayers at the death of Companion Animals.

Chris Polhill, *A Heart for Creation, Worship Resources and Reflections on the Environment* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2010)

This wonderful collection of worship resources leads from celebration, through lament, to action and transformation. There are prayers, poems, stories, reflections and songs, all sourced from the well-known Celtic tradition of the Iona Community.

Anne and Jeffery Rowthorn, *God’s Good Earth, Praise and Prayer for Creation* (Collegrave: Liturgical Press, 2018)

This very impressive book contains 52 beautiful, ready-made prayer services, each around a specific theme, drawing from a rich variety of ecumenical resources: psalms and other responsive readings, Scripture, hymns, prayers, and reflections from the world’s best nature writers. Permission is granted to the purchaser to reproduce for use in public prayer.

Bruce Stanley, *Forest Church: A Field Guide to Nature Connection for Groups and Individuals* (Powys: Mystic Christ Press, 2013)

This book looks at the sacredness of place and the different ways in which God communicates with us through our encounters with nature. This is an inspiring and practical guide to what we can do in church groups or by ourselves to root ourselves in the world God has made. Forest Church is a fresh expression of Church, finding inspiration in the rhythms of the seasons and the wisdom of Scripture.

Victoria Loorz, *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2021)

This book makes its point by rich storytelling based in the natural world, and calls us to consider how to reunite our spirituality with nature and to find God at the centre of all things.

Philip Newell, *The Book of Creation, the Practise of Celtic Spirituality* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1999)

This reflective book explores the seven days of creation through the lens of celtic spirituality, nurturing an appreciation of God's presence in the material world.

Preaching

The Preaching for God's World website offers creation-focussed reflections and prayers for each Sunday of the Lectionary year.

<https://preachingforgodsworld.org/>

Music

Climate Vigil Songs

The Porter's Gate Worship Project's *Climate Vigil Songs* (2022) contains 14 contemporary songs, sheet music and a study guide – all available for free. Isaac Wardell, creative director of The Porter's Gate Worship Project: "Theologically speaking, we wanted *Climate Vigil Songs* to do three different things. First, we wanted to sing songs that celebrate the beauty and wonder of God's creation, with a particular emphasis on God as an actor in the world. But we couldn't stop there. The second thing we had to do was pause and say, 'Something bad has happened here, and we are all responsible.' We need to feel sorrow for what has been lost, so we wrote songs that give the church words to lament the devastation of God's good earth. These are deep spiritual and Biblical expressions, not just political positions. Thirdly, we wanted to help people do something with these convictions, so we wrote songs for action and mobilisation – music for the movement – where we say 'yes' to the work we are called to do. God is restoring all things,

and He gives us hands and feet to help build His kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven." <https://youtu.be/MYr9YokEmBU>

Doxecology

UK-based Resound Worship's *Doxecology* (2020) is a collection of thirteen congregational worship songs that celebrate the wonder of creation, acknowledge our failures, and anticipate a glorious restoration in Christ. There is a CD, videos, sheet music, and a study guide with service plans. Most of these resources are free to use. www.resoundworship.org/projects/doxecology

Action

Jeremy Williams, *Time to Act* (London: SPCK, 2020)

Written by members and friends of Christian Climate Action (the Christians in Extinction Rebellion), this stimulating resource book sets out the moral and religious case for joining the struggle against climate injustice. It reflects on the Christian tradition of non-violent direct action and offers moving testimonies by those engaged in such protests today, along with sermons, prayers, liturgies and other spiritual resources to engage the head, the heart and the hands.

Jo Musker-Sherwood, *Climate. Emergence*

Jo directed a small campaign to become one of the UK's fastest growing climate charities influencing at all levels of government. This hard work took its toll, mentally and physically. Jo now writes and speaks with great wisdom about resilience and self-care for those who work in the field of climate action.

<https://www.climateemergence.co.uk/>

Buildings and Church Land

Caring for God's Acre:

Caring for God's Acre provides advice on all things to do with nature-friendly churchyard management:

www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

Eco Church Resources:

Of all the different actions suggested in this book, joining the Eco Church journey may well prove to be the most fruitful one. Eco Church provides a comprehensive framework for addressing creation care in your church context. A Rocha has also produced a superb selection of resources to help you on your journey: <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/resources/>

The Church of England Environment Programme:

This website provides a wealth of information for churches, covering everything from Boilers and Solar PV Panels to Fundraising. You can find out more about the Church of England's Routemap to Net Zero, and watch the latest webinars on specific topics. www.churchofengland.org/about/church-england-environment-programme

Study Groups

Saying Yes to Life by Dr Ruth Valerio

Saying Yes to Life (see the Theology section above) lends itself well to group discussion, but requires substantial preparatory reading for each session. Each chapter of the book ends with questions for reflection, and the Saying Yes to Life website provides video interviews and links to further resources.

York Courses – Caring for Creation (2021)

This excellent five-session course can be used by small groups as well as by individuals. It consists of a booklet and an audio CD. Up-to-date information, challenging questions, and faith-based hopefulness. (Presently out of print)

Tearfund Bible studies

Tearfund has produced a series of short bible studies available for free online:

- Biodiversity in the Bible
- Caring Creatively for God's world
- Caring for God's Creation
- Caring for our Environment
- God's care for all of creation

Tenants of the King: Operation Noah study course

This is a four-part study series.

Through interactive group sessions, video interviews with leading Christian thinkers and insightful Bible commentary, this resource will help you and your church to reflect on the challenges of a changing climate, and how Christians can respond with hope to one of today's greatest challenges. <https://operationnoah.org/church-resources/tenants/>

The Plenty! Course – Joy in Enough

Imagine a society where every person can flourish and everyone has enough. **Plenty! is a small group discussion resource** developed as part of Green Christian's 'Joy in Enough' project. Through six sessions 75-minute sessions, it explores a faith-based vision for a just and sustainable economy:

1. Plenty! – Inequality.
2. Just can't get enough – Consumerism and advertising

3. Running out of planet – The climate emergency
4. God is in business – Economic justice
5. Growing pains – The growth imperative and debt
6. Joy in Enough – Towards sustainability and wellbeing

<https://joyinenough.org/resources/plenty/>

Inter-generational Creation Care

Dr Mya-Rose Craig, *We Have a Dream, Meet 30 Young Indigenous People and People of Colour Protecting the Planet* (Dunsfold: Magic Cat, 2021)

Dr Mya-Rose Craig, who is also known as Birdgirl, is a young British-Bangladeshi race activist and environmentalist. In February 2020, Mya-Rose became the youngest British person to be awarded an honorary doctorate in science from Bristol University, in recognition of her campaigning for diversity in the environmental sector. In this book you will find inspiring stories from young people all around the world.

Paul Kerensa and Ruth Valerio, *Planet Protectors: 52 Ways to Look After God's World* (London: SPCK, 2021)

Aimed at 7-9 year-olds, this book is packed with interesting facts, Christian theology and practical tips. Planet Protectors offers 52 fantastic ideas for looking after the world – from cycling more and choosing fair-trade, to taking shorter showers and recycling – a different challenge for each week of the year.

Sally Welch, *Outdoor Church: 20 sessions to take church outside the building for children and families* (Abingdon: BRF, 2016)

A creative worship and activity resource for churches to use outside the church building. Outdoor Church functions in any green space and is suitable for churches in urban, suburban and rural contexts. It contains four sessions for each season – four stand-alone service outlines, one for each season – and even some indoor alternatives for rainy days.

The Diocese of Leeds, *Saving Creation, Links to resources for eco-ministry with children and young people.*

If you are looking to encourage and empower children, young people and families to explore the issues of climate change and creation care, in this document the Diocese of Leeds has put together a helpful list of resources: <https://learning.leeds.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Saving-Creation-Eco-ministry-with-children-and-young-people.pdf>

Messy Church Goes Wild

Messy Adventures consists of twelve messy outdoor sessions, focussed on meeting God in creation.

Each session includes fun activities, questions to discuss, 'Big Thinking' provided by scientific experts, and suggestions for creative ways of responding in Christian worship with awe, wonder and celebration. www.messychurch.org.uk/goeswild

WE ARE (Tearfund)

An inspiring and radical movement of young people who are passionate about justice and climate church. The videos produced by WE ARE speak the language of young people and are very suitable for youth groups and secondary school assemblies: www.youtube.com/wearetearfund

The Authors

Diane Craven

Diane Craven is currently a freelance writer and an education and spirituality adviser. She is passionate about ministry with children in churches and about working with them to address their concerns for the future of our planet. She worked in a variety of schools as a teacher, Deputy Head and School Chaplain with responsibility for school worship. She was then employed as Children and Youth Adviser for the Diocese of Southwark for 10 years, helping churches to reimagine their ministry and mission by placing children and young people at the heart. She is a Licensed Lay Minister in the Church of England and regularly writes resources for learning, discipleship and worship in the church. In her spare time, she enjoys exploring wild places and finding solace in nature – especially by the sea, on pilgrimage or walking amongst mountains with friends.



Johannes Nobel

The Revd Johannes (Jan) Nobel is a parish priest of two Bronze awarded Eco Churches in York, as well as the Green Ambassador for the Diocese of York. Originally from The Netherlands, Jan moved to the United Kingdom in 2006 to train for ordination with the Church of England. He holds theology degrees from universities in Leuven (BE), Utrecht (NL) and Durham, and he teaches Doctrine of Creation at the Yorkshire Theological Education Partnership. He shares his life-long love for nature with his wife, an Environmental Scientist. On his days off Jan likes to go birdwatching or fossil hunting at the Yorkshire Coast, and he is a keen photographer. Many of the images in this book are taken by Jan.





Creation isn't just for Creationtide. In this book Diane Craven and Johannes Nobel take a creation-focussed journey through the whole liturgical year, inspiring churches to link prayer with action to care for creation. The accompanying Choeselife website contains printer-friendly liturgies for you to adapt and use in your own context. This resource was made possible through a generous grant from the Church of England's Environment Programme and is available for free to all dioceses in the Church of England.



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME