



The Church of England
in Essex and East London
Diocese of Chelmsford

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Dear friends in Christ,

Taking action to change climate change

Two years ago when I visited our partner diocese of Marsabit in Kenya it had not rained for over 18 months. Bishop Qampicha drove me across the diocese, close to the border with Somalia. We passed dried up rivers where I saw an elephant digging for water with its trunk in the river bed. I visited villages where the water hole had been empty for months. We went to a reservoir where many people gathered with their animals, but I was told there was probably only enough water left there for another two months. People were travelling vast distances to come to it. Fighting regularly broke out, fuelling already anxious and volatile tribal tensions. We came across nomadic people who had abandoned the lifestyle of centuries to settle by the edge of the one tarmac road that went through the area. They showed us the skeletons of their animals that had died. They now spent their days by the side of the road waiting for the little aid that was available to fill their containers with water.

I was witnessing a whole way of life disappearing, and with it, violence was escalating: scarcity of water was the reason.

Everywhere we went children hailed us as we drove by. At first I thought they were just pleased to see us. This is true of children everywhere in the world. Then I saw they were shaking upturned empty plastic bottles. Yes, they were pleased to see us: they knew we had water on board. And they were very thirsty. Most painful of all, I saw some children drinking water from what appeared to me to be a dirty, stagnant and semi-polluted brook. I dread to think what manner of diseases that water contained. But, the thing is, if you are very thirsty you will drink whatever is available.

Kenya used to measure the year by the two seasons of the short and long rains. But what was once so predictable is now erratic. Drought is followed by flood. And uncertainty only breeds further uncertainty. A whole region is thirsting.

But it isn't just Kenya. Our world is facing a climate emergency. Our faith tells us the world was created by God and that as part of that creation we have responsibilities for it. Scientists tell us that we need to make large changes fast to avoid catastrophic threats to the conditions that support life on earth. Images in the media of the fires destroying the Amazon have brought the immense damage being done to our world into sharp focus. The actions of young people in particular Greta Thunberg have also spoken truth into the situation and challenged us about our way of living.

Christians across our diocese are engaged in seeking to prayerfully respond to climate change. Our faith is a response to the good news of the gospel. This good news invites us to live lives that proclaim that truth. I am grateful to Elizabeth Snowden, the Archdeacon of Chelmsford, who chairs our environmental group and other concerned Christians in our



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diocese for helping me prepare this letter. Here is a list of events being planned locally and nationally this autumn that you may wish to find out more about.

The Schools Strike on 20th September

This is taking place both locally and nationally. This has been happening since February this year. The September strike is calling for adults to stand alongside our children. For more information

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-08/climate-strikes-guide.pdf>

To find out about local activities use the map on: <https://globalclimatestrike.net/>

'Once in a Lifetime', from 23–24 September, St Paul's Church Cambridge.

The two-day summit led by A Rocha UK, in partnership with the Amos Trust, is seeking to explore how churches and Christians can play a greater role in addressing climate change

<https://arocha.org.uk/>

October 7-20 2019, Extinction Rebellion UK Action, central London

As a diocese we may not be able to fully endorse all of Extinction Rebellion's actions, but nonetheless we know that in the Chelmsford diocese many churches and individuals are already concerned and are praying, talking and taking actions.

We are now encouraging churches to go one step further between October 6th and October 20th to raise awareness and to take time to reflect on the issues we are all facing.

A first step is to pray.

This beautiful prayer was used in April this year during Climate Action Week. It talks about the web of life that we are part of and that as Christians we believe was created and is loved by Almighty God. If possible, please join with churches across the diocese in using this prayer in your Sunday services on October 6th and 13th.

We Hold the Earth

We hold brothers and sisters who suffer from storms and droughts intensified by climate change.

We hold all species that suffer.

We hold world leaders delegated to make decisions for life.

We pray that the web of life may be mended through courageous actions to limit carbon emissions.

We pray for right actions for adaptation and mitigation to help our already suffering earth community.

We pray that love and wisdom might inspire my actions and our actions as communities. . .

so that we may, with integrity, look into the eyes of brothers and sisters and all beings and truthfully

say, we are doing our part to care for them and the future of the children.

May love transform us and our world with new steps toward life.

Source: <https://www.faithclimateactionweek.org/prayers-and-climate-blessings/>



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Open the doors of our churches

We are also encouraging all churches to open their doors so that people can come together to pray and reflect during the two weeks of action, reaching out to both congregation members and those outside the church. There may already be those in your congregations and parishes who are grieving for what is happening to God's beautiful creation, and this may be a time when we as clergy can come alongside individuals in their sorrow and desire for action.

Peaceful protest

We recognise that not everyone across the churches of our diocese will be comfortable with public protests albeit non-violent peaceful protest. It is worth noting however, that there is a long history of Christians taking a public stand for matters of faith and justice.

Christian Climate Action have been working for many years to raise awareness of climate change and support Christians in thinking about their response to this. Between October 7th and October 20th this year, Christian Climate Action will be joining with Extinction Rebellion to proclaim the truth about the emergency the world is facing. They will be joining with other faith groups on Westminster Bridge during that period to pray, talk, sing, and dance. <https://rebellion.earth/event/faith-bridge-at-the-xr-international-rebellion-uk/>

Many who are deeply concerned about the climate emergency will be converging on London between 7th and 20th October from all parts of the country at their own expense to urge the government to act. Those from churches in London may want demonstrate our solidarity by offering accommodation. Those who are willing to do this can contact the organisers of the action directly through this form.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc5xwvNWcPQo4YusdlmdluV_rwG69Vn_bd9r752RgpkDN2w/viewform

Interfaith Bridge, 13 October, 3-5pm, central London

In addition to actions within your own church and locality, some of us plan to join Christian Climate Action at the Interfaith Bridge at Westminster on Sunday 13 October. If you or members of your congregation would like to join us, please contact

radhikabynon@yahoo.com or sandra.m.eldridge@gmail.com. There will be a meeting on

Wednesday 2nd October from 7pm to 8.30pm at St John's Stratford, E15 ING to draw concerned individuals together, give more details about the Interfaith Bridge and answer any questions about what to expect. This meeting is open to anyone, including those who might be able to answer questions as well as ask them.

Resources for services and study guides

There are resources for Sunday services produced by A Rocha as well as study material they can be found here: <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/green-communion-resources/>

There is also a short study guide written by one of the priests in our diocese in a style similar to the pilgrim courses



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“THIS? How Christians respond to Climate Change, by Susan Sayers (publisher Kevin Mayhew)

Tenants of the King

If your church wants to start finding out more about what the Bible might have to say about the climate emergency, Operation Noah, another Christian organisation working to inspire action on climate change has produced a four part study series that helps churches to reflect on the challenges of climate change: <https://operationnoah.org/resources/tenants-of-the-king-study-guide/>.

Longer term response to climate emergency

The diocesan environmental group is planning to put on a day of workshops in the New Year to explore think and pray about the world we live in; the reality of climate change and the impact this is having particularly on our partner diocese. The day will have opportunities to think about practical things individuals and churches can do for example to work towards becoming an eco-church. **Details to follow.**

We would really appreciate each deanery and each church across the diocese of Chelmsford in Essex and East London sending representatives to this event.

In the meantime for more general information and where to find out information please visit the environment pages on our website as well as those of the Church of England.

www.chelmsford.anglican.org/faith-in-action/environment

<https://www.churchofengland.org/environment>

If you would like to have someone to speak to your deanery of to your church please contact the office of the archdeacon of Chelmsford
a.chelmsford@chelmsford.anglican.org

Finally, please join me in asking God to guide and inspire us to find the courage to live and act differently that we may be good stewards of the earth,

Yours sincerely,

The Rt. Revd Stephen Cottrell
Bishop of Chelmsford



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