

# Prayer points – March 2019



## Lent 2019

As we begin the traditional time of prayer, reflection and giving, many groups have produced resources to help us reflect on our relationship with God, each other and creation. From the [Global Catholic Climate Movement's 'Eating Simply' campaign](#) to the ['Living Lent' communities](#) created by the Joint Public Issues Team in the UK to Anglican calls for 'Less Plastic for Lent', there's a huge variety of resources. Pray that Christians around the world will make use of the resources available this Lent and will grow in love of God, our fellow people, and the earth.

## Age of environmental breakdown

The UK's Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) recently released [a report titled](#) 'This is a crisis; Facing up to an age of environmental breakdown'. The summary of the report [states](#): 'Mainstream political and policy debates have failed to recognise that human impacts on the environment have reached a critical stage, potentially eroding the conditions upon which socioeconomic stability is possible. Human-induced environmental change is occurring at an unprecedented scale and pace, and the window of opportunity to avoid catastrophic outcomes in societies around the world is rapidly closing. These outcomes include economic instability, large-scale involuntary migration, conflict, famine and the potential collapse of social and economic systems. The historical disregard of environmental considerations in most areas of policy has been a catastrophic mistake.'

Among many examples, the report [notes](#) the rapid fall in global vertebrate populations since the 1970s; the loss of topsoil, which is occurring at 10 to 40 times the rate of its natural replenishment, and the way that since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, erosion has rendered 30 per cent of the world's arable land unproductive.

The IPPR report calls on politicians and policy makers to develop the sense of urgency needed to overcome environmental breakdown. Pray that the report inspires a sense of urgency – and helps lead to policies which embed climate action and environmental care.

## Forest Church

Forest Church provides a fresh way of connecting with God - learning and being open to what we can learn of God through reading his 'second book' – the created world. Allowing ourselves to be open to what God may want to communicate to us through nature is a new and exciting avenue to explore and can draw in all ages.

Forest Church draws on contemporary research that highlights the benefits of spending time with nature in wild places and on older traditions when sacred places and practices were outside. One particularly interesting idea it proposes is [Sensio Divina](#), spending time prayerfully with creation, much as in Lectio Divina, where we sit prayerfully with a Bible passage and allow it to speak into our minds and hearts.

Pray that initiatives such as Forest Church will help Christians to rediscover our relationship with the rest of God's glorious creation – and to hear what God is saying to us through all that He created.

## Global Day of Climate Action

The school climate strikes continue to grow in numbers around the world with more youngsters and more countries becoming involved each Friday. On March 15<sup>th</sup> a global school climate strike for the future is being planned for young people. Maybe some impact is being made too as the [European Commission announced a strategic long-term vision](#) for a climate neutral Europe on February 18th. Ministers called for urgent and decisive action to strengthen the global response on climate change and restated the EU's determination to lead the way on accelerated climate action on all fronts.

In December 2018, [Time magazine](#) named Greta Thunberg one of the world's 25 most influential teenagers and her quote "I want you to panic" over the climate emergency has resounded around the world. We continue to pray for the impact of what Greta and many thousands of youngsters are doing as they miss school on Fridays to fight for their future.

## Fire ...

Shorts and T-shirts in the UK in February? Around the world, heat records continue to be set. Globally, 2018 is now [acknowledged officially by the US agencies NASA and NOAA](#) as the fourth hottest year on record – with 2015, 2016 and 2017 the years ahead of it. But global averages, while meaningful scientifically, don't always feel real to people. What is gaining attention, however, are some of the extreme heat records being set in specific places within the wider context. In the UK, [the highest winter temperatures on record](#) (21.2 C/ 70F) have inspired enjoyment of the balmy weather – but also [concern](#) as people acknowledge the trends involved. Australia, meanwhile, [has just experienced its hottest summer on record](#), with maximum and mean temperatures about 2 degrees above long-term averages.

Every hot day isn't necessarily a sign of climate change – but the trend is clear ... and becoming clearer. Indeed the [Met Office has forecast](#) that the decade from 2014-2023 will be the hottest on record, and noted that we could temporarily break the 1.5 degree limit for warming within five years. Pray that discussions about the heat reflect the wider issues and inspire the urgent action we need to hold overall warming well below 2 degrees Celsius, with an aim of limiting it to 1.5.

## Ice

While heat has been much in the news, so has ice. The US experienced an extreme cold wave thanks to a displacement of the [polar vortex](#), with tens of millions of people [estimated to have been affected by temperatures of -28C or lower](#). Unsurprisingly, those who deny the evidence of climate change seized on this as support for their position, despite work done by responsible media and scientists to explain the causes of the cold and [how they may relate to a changing climate](#).

On a wider level, the signs in the polar regions are very concerning. The Arctic has seen what [NOAA called](#) a “multi-year stretch of record and near-record warmth unlike any period on record” - warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet, because of feedback loops. In the Antarctic, concerns are rising about melting in the [Thwaites Glacier](#), and [new studies suggest](#) that the Antarctic may contribute more to sea-level rise than had been suggested by the last major IPCC synthesis report.

Pray for the polar ecosystems that are affected by this rapid warming, and for the communities whose traditional way of life is at risk. Pray that we can take action for their sake. In words taken from a [longer prayer in the tradition of Canada's indigenous communities](#): *“Let us think of ... the Earth, on whom we walk and who supports us. We pray we can learn to walk on her with more respect.”*

## Changing the Fossil Fuel Landscape

Pressure continues to rise for a transition from a fossil-fuel economy to a low-carbon economy. In December, [350.org celebrated](#) the 1,000<sup>th</sup> commitment from an institution to divest from the world's largest oil, coal and gas companies. This is a remarkable achievement, co-founder of 350.org Bill McKibben noted, given that the first institutional divestment announcement took place in 2012. Divestment is helping to restrict fossil fuel companies' 'social licence' and access to funds – and to accelerate investment in alternatives.

Engagement, too, is having an impact. [Climate Action 100+](#), the coalition of investors with over 33 trillion dollars under management, [has been cited in Glencore's recent decision](#) to cap coal production, as well as in a recent [commitment by Shell](#) to emissions reductions.

This is progress in the right direction – but the pace needs to increase. As The Economist – generally in favour of market solutions - [recently noted](#), there is a need not only for continued market pressure but also for government regulation to ensure that fossil fuels stay in the ground. Give thanks for the growing consensus around the need for a change, for the organisations working on divestment, engagement and government policy, and for all that has been accomplished. Pray that continued pressure from divestment activists, investors and governments will accelerate the transition we all need to preserve the earth we love.