

Prayer points – June 2019



Kingdom Values

Although many people have been campaigning about the issue for years, climate change has finally made its way to the top of the media agenda, thanks to the civil disobedience of Extinction Rebellion, the tenacity of 16 year old activist Greta Thunberg and a powerful David Attenborough documentary.

Each warn about the urgency of the situation we now face - and with the UN reporting that we have only 11 years to turn things around - they are right to do so. Time is of the essence.

What sort of world will our children and grandchildren inherit if we don't act? God cares about passionately about justice and mercy, and climate change is a justice issue. Those who are historically least culpable, the global poor, are disproportionately affected and have least resilience. This matters to God and it should matter to us too. No wonder agencies such as Christian Aid have made campaigning against climate change a priority.

Christians are called to live the values of the Kingdom and surely respect for the natural world is such a value. When we change our behaviour to show greater respect to the environment, it can influence policy makers and CEOs alike. It is a symbolic action, like those enacted by the prophets of old, and if enough people say no to the exploitation of the planet, then a critical mass can be reached.

We can't face up to the facts about climate change and do nothing. The ecological crisis may well convert us to a greater respect for the natural world and a fairer and more just world. That might be challenging, but is arguably, long overdue.

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Melting Ice, Rising Seas

Parts of the world's largest ice shelf - Antarctica's Ross Ice Shelf - are melting 10 times faster than the shelf's average rate notes a recent report. Researchers found that the sun was warming the surface ocean water, causing the ice shelf to melt at much higher than expected rates. The finding that the ice shelf is so sensitive to surface ocean temperatures means it is likely to melt even faster in the future. This comes as other research shows widespread thinning of Antarctic ice – and a new study suggests long-term sea level rises could be far higher than those found in IPCC projections. Pray that these findings will receive the concern they warrant.

Unprecedented declines in nature

In May the UN's Intergovernmental Panel for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services released its 'Global Assessment'. The report paints a stark picture of unprecedented declines in nature: extinction rates are accelerating, and an estimated one million plant and animal species are threatened with extinction. "The essential, interconnected web of life on Earth is getting smaller and increasingly frayed," said Professor Josef Settele, a member of the panel. "This loss is a direct result of human activity."

Current efforts to respond to the threat aren't sufficient to meet the danger. There is vital work ahead to keep the question of earth's survival in the public eye and to push towards the action that scientists tell us is needed. For us as individuals, there will be practical actions to take, such as avoiding unsustainable palm oil. There's also a need to help ourselves, our churches and wider society to change our current mindset. Might we be able to play our part by, for example:

- Reconnecting with the sense of wonder at the miracle of God's diverse creation, so that we can truly appreciate and love what we are in danger of losing
- Countering views that see creation as a means of meeting our needs
- Reflecting on Richard Bauckham's idea of a 'community of creation', in which all created things exist to praise God ... and we are invited to listen to their praise and to 'join the choir'?

We give thanks to God for the majesty and diversity of creation and ask forgiveness for our part in misusing creation's gifts. We pray that this UN report will inspire genuine action to preserve and protect species and ecosystems. We ask that God will lay on each person's heart things that they can do to play their part in protecting the earth.

Working to preserve local ecosystems

A new video 'Our Sand' follows a young geologist as she explores the impacts of sand mining in her community in South Africa. The sand is being mined by companies to create bricks and plastering – and the mining is destroying the river and its ecosystems and creating a profound sense of loss for residents. The owner of a local sand and brick business justifies the companies' actions by saying "The communities need it ... everyone is building." But "as much as we want houses," says the young geologist, "we also want a healthy and good environment not just for us but for generations to come ... we can't continue sandmining like this." Affected communities had already tried to oppose the mining but felt powerless – since the film was shown, they have renewed their efforts and are also promoting the search for new ways of building that don't use sand.

Unsustainable sand mining is a global problem. Give thanks for this film and other work that draws attention to the issue. Pray that the communities seen in 'Our Sand' – and communities around the world – will successfully protect their local ecosystems. Pray for all of us that we will be conscious that the resources we use for building and daily life do not come from a vacuum and will seek to live more sustainably.

Disinvesting from fossil fuels

In recent months a variety of churches and church organisations worldwide, including the Austrian Bishops Conference, the Catholic Diocese of San Carlos in the Philippines, and The United Reformed Church (URC) in the UK have all moved to disinvest from fossil fuels. The URC's resolution, approved by its governing body in May, states that the URC should drop investments in companies whose total turnover is more than 10% derived from the extraction or supply of fossil fuels, including oil and gas, by the time of its General Assembly in 2020 (The URC divested from coal and tar sands in 2015). The resolution also encourages a scaling up of investment in renewable energy and clean technologies, and advocacy for the UK to reach net zero well before 2050. It further encourages URC synods and churches to follow the national lead. A separate motion also committed URC churches to strive to achieve the same net zero target in their church life.

The bishop of San Carlos stated about his diocese's action: "We need to 'walk our talk!' We need to be consistent and maintain our moral integrity. We need to communicate to our financial institutions what our true priorities are, what principles and values we want to live by and we are ready to back these up through effective gestures and actions!" Please pray that all churches and Christian institutions may seek to 'walk their talk' in the way they invest their money.

Now is the Time

On June 26th thousands of UK residents who care about our climate are expected to come together to send a message to MPs – it's time to act to protect the things we love. It's a great time to be talking with politicians, given the rising awareness of climate issues, the UK Climate Change Committee's recent report on a net zero target for the UK, and the Scottish government's adoption of a net zero by 2045 target. The Climate Coalition has provided resources for planning, and for Christians there are additional resources on the CTBI website and from Christian Aid. Catholic development agency CAFOD is also organising pilgrimages to Westminster. We pray that many Christians will take part and will write to their politicians, and that real progress will be made towards a world in which the UK no longer contributes direct carbon emissions.

Prayers and Thanksgivings

Pray that:

- investment in renewables will increase. The International Energy Agency reported that investment in renewables fell slightly last year, while investment in fossil fuels rose. Pray this reverses.
- the recent Australian elections won't discourage politicians in Australia and other countries from addressing climate change. Despite much discussion of a 'climate vote', the Liberal-National coalition, which has not favoured action on fossil fuels, retained power. Many Australians still wish for climate action, so pray for a change of heart in the coalition, for changed policies, and for parties favouring climate action to learn from the results and to campaign more effectively.

Give thanks that:

- China is seeking to remove from use the most polluting diesel trucks, and some Asian banks are restricting their financing of new coal plants.
- New York State has adopted new rules to phase out coal for power generation by 2020