

Prayer points – September 2019



Climate change and land use

“Land is already under growing human pressure, and climate change is adding to these pressures. At the same time, keeping global warming to well below 2°C can be achieved only by reducing greenhouse gas emissions from all sectors including land and food.”

This was the [headline message](#) of a new [IPCC report on climate change and land use](#). The report paints a worrying picture: our current ways of producing food, practicing forestry and using land are contributing almost a quarter of global emissions, hastening climate change and helping to create a vicious cycle in which land degradation and climate change exacerbate each other. Continuing on the present path isn't really an option if we want the earth to be able to sustain life. The report recommends positive action at all levels to address the challenge, with a strong focus on moves to reduce meat and dairy consumption. The good news is that such changes could make a profound difference; [a shift to a plant-based diet, for example, could](#) release massive amounts of land for restoration of ecosystems and the absorption of carbon. .

Please pray that the report inspires effective action to change the way we look at creation; improve the way we grow, transport and eat food; and heal the land that sustains us all.

Fires in Brazilian rainforest

Issues about land use are at the heart of the widespread fires in the Brazilian rainforest that have been making headlines around the world. The rainforest, often called the 'lungs of the Earth', is home to myriad indigenous communities and to an amazing diversity of plant and animal species. For years, however, it has been under threat from those who cut down and burn trees to convert the land to other uses, including ranching and growing soya for cattle feed. Attempts to prevent such destruction have often been met with violence. The new president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, [favours commercial development](#) of the Amazon and has offered encouragement to those expanding farming, logging and mining, while [reducing capacity in the agency](#) that is supposed to protect the forest. More fires have, therefore, been set – an estimated 84% increase on 2018.

This has an impact not only on the communities and ecosystems directly affected but also more widely. Scientists fear that the deforestation [is close to precipitating a 'tipping point'](#) where the reduction in forested area would [lead trees to die back](#), turning areas of carbon-absorbing forest into carbon emitting savannah. This would have a devastating impact not only on the region but on all [efforts to meet the Paris goals](#).

In response to international pressure, Bolsonaro has now sent [some military to fight the fires](#), [accepted some international help](#), and banned for 60 days the setting of new fires. We give thanks for these decisions. We pray they will be enforced effectively and lead to long-term protection of the forests and the rights of the people in them. We pray for the meeting of Amazon leaders the President is convening, and for the forthcoming [Synod of Bishops on the Amazon](#), to be held in the Vatican in October. May God use these gatherings to raise awareness of what is at stake and to build cooperation to protect the Amazon region.

Eating thoughtfully and joyfully

How then shall we eat? The Jubilee Centre in the UK has produced a range of useful resources around [Thoughtful Eating](#). The materials which include a book, blogs and podcasts explore the Biblical ethics of food and are a reminder that thoughtful eating is a joyful thing, emphasising our relationships with each other and with the rest of the natural world. Accessible and enjoyable, these resources, and others like them, can help all of us to prayerfully consider our own diets: pray that many will use them.

Psalm 51:10-12

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

[Global climate strike](#)

On two Fridays, 20th and 27th September, the young people's school climate strike movement is calling for people of all ages and nationalities to join in a global strike for the climate. People around the world are planning events, small and large. The events differ based on what is possible for students and workers in their own contexts, but [each sends a clear and powerful message](#): in the light of the crisis our planet faces, we can't continue with business as usual: "We need to act right now to stop burning fossil fuels and ensure a rapid energy revolution with equity, reparations and [climate justice](#) at its heart." We pray that many people will take part, and that the call for a rapid and just transition will be heard and heeded. We pray especially for Christian groups involved in the strikes, as they work alongside others and bring a Christian perspective.

[World Cleanup Day](#)

Plastic pollution is both an environmental threat in its own right and also a contributor to climate change. On 21 September, people around the world will participate in [World Cleanup Day](#). While they're removing waste, they'll be raising awareness of waste issues and building a movement to tackle plastic pollution. Pray that many participate, and that momentum on tackling plastic continues to grow.

[UN Assembly](#)

On the 23rd of September, leaders from around the world will gather for the UN Secretary-General's [Climate Action Summit](#). The theme will be 'A race we can win. A race we must win', and the Secretary-General has been calling for concrete pledges of action from nations and businesses that will inspire a 'race to the top'. He's [written to all countries](#), asking them to bring plans for reducing emission by 2030 and achieving a net zero target by 2050. The meeting faces some challenges: US participation, for example, will lack solid federal leadership, and a group of developing countries that includes some of the world's largest polluters [is arguing for different priorities](#). We pray that despite the different agendas and tensions, the summit will be a step towards increasing national ambitions, creating a green economy, and fulfilling the Paris goals.

[Funeral for a glacier](#)

Iceland's Prime Minister was among the mourners at a funeral ceremony held to mark the melting of the [Okjokull glacier](#). The glacier is the first in Iceland to be lost due to global heating. Others are likely to follow. Glaciers currently cover about 11% of Iceland's surface, but Iceland loses about 11 billion tonnes of ice per year, and scientists have warned that about 400 other glaciers are also at risk. The government is already planning for a future where all of them could vanish.

Loss of ice has many potentially significant impacts. Iceland's glaciers help to cool down the island's volcanoes. They also provide fresh water for the island – a resource that could be at risk after the ice melts and its waters evaporate. This risk exists in other regions as well, including Asia, where glaciers in the Himalayas provide water for many rivers that flow into the Indian sub-continent, and the Andes, where glaciers provide melt water for Peru and other countries. We pray for all affected by glacial melting and all seeking to help areas adapt. And we pray for action to cut the emissions that are heating our world.

[Meeting the Challenge](#) *(adapted from 'Climate Emergency – Action Stations')*

"How do we handle the climate emergency? For some people the term emergency feels disempowering, as if we're saying that the situation is beyond our control, too difficult to resolve and hence pointless to fight. There are, however, positive models for emergency action. One is the airline pilot 'Sully' Sullenberger and his team. Sullenberger [famously landed](#) a crippled, engine-less jet in the Hudson River without loss of life. Faced with a seemingly hopeless situation, he drew on decades of experience, his own courage and skill, the knowledge of what the technology he commanded *could* do, and a well-trained team of flight attendants, air-traffic controllers, and others. Together, they worked out what needed to be done and did it.

For us, too, the declaration of an emergency can be the impetus not for panic but for a focused, realistic assessment of where we are, the tools available to us, the changes that need to happen, and how we can both implement them on a small scale and work with others to see them implemented on a large scale. What would it look like if our churches committed, this Season of Creation, to developing over the coming year a credible net zero plan and/or a credible plan to celebrate and protect biodiversity... and then began a process of exploring the underlying principles and the technical tools that could shape their response?"