

Prayer points – October 2019



Global School Strike

On Friday 20th September **over 4 million people in 185 countries** joined in to support school children on the global school strike in over 6,100 towns and cities. Overall, more than 7 million people joined the strikes in the week from the 20th to the 27th. What an amazing growth in response to a movement that began with one schoolgirl striking in Sweden just over a year ago! While many organisations support the strikes and often like to take credit for their own role, nevertheless this movement belongs firmly in the hands of students, many striking at considerable personal cost. One of the people writing these prayer points said: "In my nearby small Shropshire town we were 300 strong, and gentle control remained in the capable hands of two 17 year olds, despite a variety of organisations and political candidates joining in. No-one was given more than 3 minutes up front!"

This mobilisation brings hope to people young and old who long for climate action. We give thanks for the way it has given new momentum and energy to work on climate responses. We pray that it will continue to inspire individuals, businesses, and governments to increase their efforts to heal and protect our world.

UN Climate Summit

One of those inspired by the school strikes is UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. He [opened the climate summit in New York](#) by asking delegates to "heed the calls of wise leaders -- religious, business and especially young people who are taking to the streets to demand that we change our relationship with nature now."

Greta Thunberg was present and [made an impassioned and emotional plea for action](#), telling world leaders: *"People are suffering, people are dying, entire ecosystems are collapsing ... and all you talk about is money and eternal fairy tales of economic growth. How dare you?... We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up. And change is coming, whether you like it or not."*

Did the summit deliver? There was some progress - especially from the private sector and governments below national level. The World Resources Institute's [summary](#) noted that, among other things, 87 businesses worth \$2.3 trillion dollars signed on to 1.5 degree targets (though [these are open to question](#)); 100 cities committed to reach net zero by 2050; and more than 130 banks, with \$47 trillion in assets, [signed on to the UN's new Principles for Responsible Banking](#). An initiative to have net zero carbon shipping by 2030 [was launched](#). Almost seventy countries [have also committed to reach net zero](#) by mid-century, and a similar number [have announced](#) they will up their climate pledges in 2020.

But there were [few concrete announcements at national level](#), and the world's [biggest polluting nations](#) - the US, China and India - [said little or nothing](#). Climate finance also remains an issue: there were helpful developments, such as new commitments to the Green Climate Fund, and the UK's [announcement of £1 billion in international climate finance](#). It's often unclear, however, whether aid is additional to or diverted from other priority areas, and far more needs to be on the table to meet the \$100 billion a year Paris commitment.

We give thanks for the focus the summit placed on climate action and the progress that was made. But we also pray for far more concrete progress, to match the urgency of the need, over the next year.

Why we need more

A report – [United in Science](#) - coordinated by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) with contributions from multiple leading agencies, was published just before the UN Climate Summit. It paints a clear picture of accelerating global heating and increased impacts, noting that the five-year period from 2014 to 2019 is on track to be the warmest on record, that sea ice and ice mass are decreasing rapidly, that sea-level rise has accelerated from 3mm/yr in 1997-2006 to 4mm/yr in 2007-2016, sea-level acidification has increased by 26% in the industrial era, and CO2 emissions have now hit highs not seen for millions of years. There is, moreover, a continued increase in emissions - and a gap between countries' commitments and what's needed to keep global heating below 2 degrees. We pray that these findings, gathered together, will increase the pressure for countries to raise their commitments so that we don't continue on a pathway that would lead to warming of 2.9 to 3.4 degrees, but move towards the Paris goals.

Oceans and Small Island States

Another new [IPCC report](#) was published on September 25th It [notes](#) pervasive changes to the oceans and cryosphere (earth's frozen water), painting a sobering picture of changes more rapid than expected and possible sea-level rises higher than expected. This raises issues about losses, displacement and migration, as vulnerable coastal communities are affected both by sea-level rise and by increasingly severe extreme weather events. Small Island States are particularly vulnerable: "More than 80% of small island residents live near the coast where flooding and coastal erosion already pose serious problems...[T]here is growing concern that some island nations as a whole may become uninhabitable due to rising sea levels and climate change."

Adaptation can help meet some risks, but not all. That was clear last month when Hurricane Dorian, one of the strongest Category 5 hurricanes recorded, first hit Abaco Island with winds of up to 185 mph and [then stalled](#) over Grand Bahama Island for over 24 hours. In both places damage from winds and storm surge were severe, and many people died: the [official death toll](#) now stands at 56, but 600 people are still missing. We pray for all affected by Dorian and other storms. And we pray for action that will preserve our oceans and frozen water.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV version)

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

Choosing the right road ...

From Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) "We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the road in Robert Frost's famous poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been travelling is deceptively easy, a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at the end lies disaster. The other fork in the road the one 'less travelled by' offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of the earth."

What can we do?

Our choices can make a difference! For example, individuals who monitor their energy use report encouraging results as they change their behaviour and technology. And a colleague of ours recently heard from a representative of the UK's National Grid that increased efficiency in homes was reducing demand enough to release power for new projects, such as the electrification of transport.

We're even more powerful when we act as communities. Initiatives like A Rocha's [Eco Church](#) and CAFOD's [Live Simply](#) awards in the UK, [Green Anglicans](#) in Southern Africa, and Citizens for Public Justice's offering of '[5 Cs of Christian Environmentalism](#)' in Canada can help churches to start the conversations that lead to shared action. There are now thousands of churches involved with these and other initiatives. And these churches are helping whole denominations to ask key questions, such as: what would it mean to be a zero waste church? How could we set our own net zero targets? There's so much potential! We give thanks for the burgeoning Christian concern in this area and pray that as individual Christians and churches we may show leadership in caring for our common home.

The power of vision

"We went to the moon, and we discovered the Earth." Jacques Yves Cousteau in the foreword to his *The Home Planet* (1988) wrote: "From their exceptional journeys, they (the cosmonauts) all came back with the revelation of beauty...They all emphasize that our planet is one, that borderlines are artificial, that humankind is one single community on spaceship Earth. They all insist that this fragile gem is at our mercy, and that we must all endeavour to protect it."

Good News on Renewable Power

In the UK, contracts were awarded in September for [new windfarms with a difference](#) - they're not only going to be subsidy-free, but are expected to pay hundreds of millions of pounds towards consumer bills by 2027. The wind farms are due to provide nearly 6 gigawatts of capacity and should produce enough electricity to power 6.5 million homes. We give thanks for these exciting developments and pray they'll inspire wider uptake of renewables globally.