

Prayer points – March 2020



New net zero target for the Church of England

In February [the General Synod](#) of the Church of England passed a motion calling all parts of the church to “urgently examine what would be required to reach net zero emissions by 2030 in order that a plan of action can be drawn up to achieve that target” The news surprised many. Some feared the new target could cause resentment, particularly in smaller, poorly funded churches facing the challenges of updating ancient buildings. Others were delighted that the church has taken the lead in this way. The UK Government target remains at 2050.

The target is certainly ambitious. But its significance may lie less in the precise nature of the date than in the urgency with which it requires the church to move – an urgency that is needed for the sake of future generations and people around the world already suffering from climate impacts. It will require strategic planning and funding: dioceses and churches will need focused guidance and practical help to achieve the necessary changes to heating and lighting systems and ways of working, and to consider ways of generating renewable power.

Tackling the climate emergency in this way will be a significant part of the Church’s life and mission. We pray that it will be effective and will inspire action by others – and will help people to encounter Christ. As the Revd Professor Martin Gainsborough says: “By committing itself to altering radically the way it lives for the sake of others, the Church is doing no more than following Jesus’s teaching. As a result, more will learn of Jesus’s love.”

Warming Oceans

[A new study shows](#) that the temperatures of the world’s oceans reached record highs in 2019. Moreover, this was no single-year phenomenon: “The past five years are the top five warmest years in the ocean historically with modern instruments, and the past ten years are also the top ten years on record” [the study says](#).

The usual measure of global heating is the average air temperature, but this can be quite variable from year to year so the ocean temperature provides a much clearer indication of the upward trend – especially as the world’s oceans absorb more than 90% of the heat arising from increases in greenhouse gases. “The oceans are really what tell us how fast the Earth is warming,” [said](#) study team member Professor John Abraham.

“We found that 2019 was not only the warmest year on record, it displayed the largest single-year increase of the entire decade, a sobering reminder that human-caused heating of our planet continues unabated,” [said](#) Professor Michael Mann.

Damien Carrington [noted](#): “Hotter oceans lead to more severe storms and disrupt the water cycle, meaning more floods, droughts and wildfires, as well as a steady rise in sea level.” They also have an impact on marine life.

There are so many hugely worrying trends, it’s easy to become overwhelmed. But we place the situation before God, and pray God will guide scientists and world leaders to find – and take – pathways to effective large-scale action. We pray too that all of us will take the daily actions that provide a political climate for change – and make a difference when multiplied by the numbers of people taking them.

Psalm 51: 1, 2, 10-12

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

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.

Lord, Help us spend more time with you in prayer this Lent and renew a steadfast spirit within us. Help us to fast from all that distracts us from listening to what God is asking of us.

Lent

Many churches around the world are using the season of Lent to help their members respond to the challenges facing our common home. The World Council of Churches' ['Seven Weeks for Water'](#) focuses on issues facing Oceania, including climate change. Southern Africa's Green Anglicans are inviting people to ['Fast for the Earth'](#) with a calendar of suggested actions and a pledge card. The Joint Public Issues' Team's ['Living Lent'](#) website aims to 'create a climate of change' by offering people suggestions for action, devotions, and the chance to join an online community. The Church of England's [#LiveLent campaign](#) offers a free app or a small booklet with daily readings, devotions and suggestions for action. -

How can we use such resources? One church has provided a Lenten Eco challenge to all its congregations. It consists of an introduction and then 20 challenges, some relatively easy – take a walk each week to prayerfully appreciate God's creation, change one bulb to an LED version – and some more far reaching = such as pledge to buy no new clothes or shoes during Lent or work out a household carbon footprint. Several are designed for children to take a lead on – planting an area of wildflower seeds and planting a tree in a local afforestation project. The children have a particular helper – Eeyore the Eco donkey, who will be appearing around the church with tree seedlings and packets of wildflower seeds. There's no check up on people – that's between them and God - but a board to record household totals will provide a useful overview.

Thawing permafrost in the Arctic

The Arctic is currently warming faster than anywhere else on earth. A recent [piece](#) on Yale University's climate blog details a key impact, the thawing of huge areas of permafrost, a frozen layer of soil under the Arctic tundra. This thawing has several serious consequences.

Arctic soils are made up of as much as 80% ice, so as the permafrost melts, the ground collapses leaving pools of mud and silt, instead of supporting a varied tundra with the many berries, shrubs, sedges, and lichen that provide abundant food for the Arctic's indigenous people and the animals with which they share the region. The melting permafrost is also triggering landslides and massive slumping of soil into lakes and seashores at alarming rates, changing the whole landscape and releasing heavy metals that had been locked away.

The thawing also could release vast amounts of greenhouse gases including methane, carbon dioxide, and nitrous oxide, which have been stored in the permafrost for millennia. This has enormous implications for climate change, given that, as author Ed Struzik [notes](#), the Arctic permafrost contains an estimated 1,400 gigatons of carbon, *"about four times more carbon than humans have emitted since the Industrial Revolution, and nearly twice as much as is currently contained in the atmosphere."* With 2 degrees of warming, almost 40% of that permafrost could disappear, releasing its gases into the air.

Thawing permafrost is one of the potential impacts and drivers of climate change about which scientists have long been most concerned. We pray for the people of the Arctic region who are experiencing its impacts directly, and for action to slow the global heating that leads to the permafrost thawing.

A precedent-setting judgement

Recent news is that the court of appeal in the United Kingdom [has ruled that plans for a third runway at Heathrow Airport are illegal](#), as the UK Government [had not taken into accounts its climate commitments under the Paris Agreement when creating its airport's national policy statement](#), which enabled approval of the Heathrow proposals. This is a hugely significant case, as it sets a precedent for challenging other high-carbon projects. Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh, assistant professor of public international law at Leiden University, said: *"[The decision's] implications are global For the first time, a court has confirmed that the Paris agreement temperature goal has binding effect."*

We give thanks for this decision and the hope that it gives. And we pray that it will indeed set a precedent for the Paris Agreement to be binding, and countries' climate commitments to be honoured in all their decision-making.

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