

Prayer points – October 2020



Wildfires

Pictures of glowing orange skies in San Francisco, burned-out lands and homes, and giant plumes of smoke from the north-western US wildfires have filled the news this past month. We pray for all people and all of creation affected by these wildfires and the fires affecting Argentina, Brazil, the [Arctic](#) and other areas. Indeed, we pray for all of us, as the [greenhouse gases they are releasing affect us all](#). While there [are many factors that affect the frequency and scale of wildfires](#), scientists are clear that [climate change in many areas is increasing fire risks](#) as, for example, in California, where [increased hot weather has dried out vegetation and extended the range of fire seasons](#). We pray for all working to [predict](#) and manage fire risks – and for greater climate action to slow down the heating that is so dangerous.

Plastic Pollution

Covid-19 has brought many negative impacts. In addition to health issues, one is plastic pollution - a major problem as a result of both disposable PPE and single-use facemasks. [Scientists at University College London](#) estimate that if everyone one in the UK used a single-use face mask every day for a year, over 66,000 tons of contaminated waste could be created each year in the UK, with ten times the climate change impact that would be caused by wearing reusable masks. In addition to the general risks, the masks also pose a specific threat to sea birds, which can get tangled up in the elastic cords. Reusable masks, which are readily available, can help to alleviate the problem. Pray that we can find ways to keep both people and our environment safe.

East African flooding

[According to the Daily Telegraph](#), huge areas of East Africa are submerged by devastating flooding. “In Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda torrential rains have displaced well over a million people and are threatening already vulnerable food supplies. In Ethiopia, over 500,000 people have been affected after several rivers broke their banks... Officials say the floods have killed animals and destroyed homes and crops in a way not seen in decadesThe river Nile regularly bursts its banks in Sudan, irrigating the area But this year the Nile has reached such an ‘unprecedented level’ that the water is threatening some of the country’s ancient pyramids. The rains have destroyed around 100,000 homes, displacing more than 600,000 people and killing over 100 people. The flooding has also impacted parts of West Africa including Nigeria and Senegal. The river Niger broke its banks in Niamey, Niger’s capital, sweeping away mud huts and displacing more than 225,000 people. In Nigeria, with its giant population of 200m, the floods have reportedly washed away a quarter of the rice harvest. Even the arid coastal nation of Senegal has been impacted.” We lament the destruction experienced by so many, pray for all affected – and pray for generous assistance to help these countries with recovery and rebuilding.

China’s commitment to reducing emissions

In a move [hailed by some as the most significant policy change since the Paris Agreement](#), China’s Xi Jinping made two key pledges at the UN General Assembly. The first is to bring forward the date when the country’s carbon emissions will peak – from “around 2030” to “before 2030” The second is that China will reach carbon neutrality by 2060. China is [already on track to reach its previous peak emissions target](#), so the first pledge comes as less of a surprise. But the carbon neutrality goal is new – and holds huge potential Some estimates say that if the target is met, it could reduce predicted warming this century by 0.2 to 0.3 degrees Celsius. But will it happen? Some are cautious: [one expert said](#) “I think it is potentially enormous — stressing both words.” There are numerous caveats. The pledge – like so many– [didn’t come with a plan](#) for how the target will be met. Others have questioned what is included in ‘carbon neutrality’ – will it include methane, for example? Or only carbon dioxide emissions? What about carbon sinks? But even those with questions say that this is a tremendously important move, as it represents China [taking responsibility](#) for addressing its huge role in creating global emissions. Pray that the targets will be met or exceeded, for the good of the whole planet.

Psalm 65: 5b-8

O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. By your strength you established the mountains, you are girded with might. You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of the peoples. Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.

Protecting biodiversity

David Attenborough's recent BBC programme on extinction provided a powerful wake-up call on the urgent need for action. It was aired to coincide with the publishing of a [report by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity](#), which revealed that, globally, not a single one of its biodiversity targets would be met by 2020.

As part of the UN biodiversity summit, world leaders from 5 continents came together to pledge *"to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 for sustainable development"* and committed themselves to *"matching our collective ambition for nature, climate and people with the scale of the crisis at hand."* The Guardian [noted](#) that the [Leaders Pledge for Nature](#) "[includes] a renewed effort to reduce deforestation, halt unsustainable fishing practices, eliminate environmentally harmful subsidies and begin the transition to sustainable food production systems and a circular economy over the next decade. The leaders describe the pledge as a 'turning point' by which future generations will judge their willingness to act on environmental destruction."

Turning high-level action into words needs grassroots support. In the UK, the Royal Society for Protection of Birds released its own report assessing the progress of the UK government. This notes that the UK has actually met only three of the international targets – and has gone backwards in six areas. *"The obvious conclusion we make is that our current approach is woefully inadequate,"* [wrote](#) the RSPB's Martin Harper. But he emphasised that there is still hope if rapid action is taken, and the charity has launched a campaign to push for legally binding targets to restore nature across the UK. We pray for preservation of the marvellous diversity of God's creation in all countries, and for efforts such as that of the world leaders and the RSPB to be effective.

Making transitions

Transitions to a low-carbon world are happening at many levels. Individuals are making moves to a low-carbon diet – and inspiring an ever-larger market in plant-based foods. The switch to fossil-free transport is moving forward. Recently California announced that it will [ban sales of new fossil-fuel cars by 2035](#), and there [are calls for the UK to move its date for this to 2030](#). In the energy sector, Poland has committed to phasing out coal by 2050; General Electric has said [it will no longer build coal-fired plants](#), and [BP has stated](#) that peak oil has already passed, and that [fossil fuel companies will urgently need to reinvent themselves](#). All signs of a much-needed transition. We give thanks for all these, and pray that they will accelerate, be accomplished in ways that promote justice and equality, and lead to genuine emissions reductions.

Sustainable and responsible investment and divestment

Around the world Christians are divesting from fossil fuels: the Global Catholic Climate Movement, World Council of Churches, Green Anglicans, GreenFaith, and Operation Noah [are preparing for another major divestment announcement](#) and a fund which manages investments on behalf of many Church of England dioceses and churches, [has recently sold](#) its last remaining shares in fossil fuel companies. Interestingly, they made the decision on the basis of the financial risks posed by the outlook for the oil and gas markets. At the same time, we're being encouraged to invest in ways that are sustainable and responsible. The Bishop of Salisbury in the UK recently noted in support of the UK's [Good Money Week](#), *"There is great potential to use our money for the benefit of society and the environment ... to make our money work to sustain our common home."* We give thanks for initiatives that are helping individual Christians, churches, and Christian institutions to use their money to show love of God and neighbour through care for creation – and pray many will join in with them.