

## Prayer points – May 2023



### Come, Holy Spirit – from a reflection by Simo Frestadius

*“At Pentecost God’s Spirit was poured out on the people of God ... The Spirit of Pentecost is also the Spirit of Creation. The same Spirit that was ‘hovering over the face of the waters’ (Gen. 1:2) and who together with God’s Word brought creation into being, is the same Spirit that dwells in us. If we are filled with the Spirit that brought order out of chaos and created the world, then it is not hard to argue that this Spirit of Creation also provides the resources and energy for us to fulfil the first commission given to humans; to be stewards of God’s creation.”*

### **Record Heat**

*“We are not used to this kind of heat,” [said Urmila Das](#), from the Indian city of Guwahati, as she kept her children home from school because of the risks from a [brutal April heatwave](#) sweeping across Asia. The extreme heat has affected about a [third of the world’s people](#). In some areas, [national and local records have shattered](#): there were new national highs of 45.4 degrees Celsius ( 113.7F) in Thailand and 42.7 (109F) in Laos; new regional highs at many Chinese recording stations; and the hottest day for almost 60 years in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Meanwhile North Africa, Spain, and Portugal have also been suffering: Spain [has seen temperatures 10 to 15 degrees Celsius higher](#) than average, including a high of 38.8 Celsius (101.84 F). The impact of these heatwaves is [exacerbated by the fact that they are occurring early in the year](#), when people’s bodies are not yet acclimatised to hot weather.*

Our prayers almost every month for areas experiencing extreme heat reflect the reality that climate change is no longer a concern for the future: already, as predicted, heatwaves are becoming longer and more extreme. Carbon Brief recently [noted](#): “In 2022 alone ... approximately 380 million people saw their hottest single hourly temperature ever recorded.” A [recent study concluded](#) that [31% of the world’s areas had seen ‘exceptional’](#) – ie beyond statistical maxima – heat since 1959, and that many other areas are likely to [do](#) so. Its authors [warned](#) that areas that have so far escaped extreme heat need to start making plans now to deal with the [dangers it poses](#), especially for people who have to work outside, children, older people, and people without easy access to cool spaces or water.

Father, we see – and lament - how failure to address climate issues is affecting many people, especially those who are most vulnerable. We pray for relief for people suffering because of the recent heat, ask you to grant wisdom to people planning strategies for coping with heat, and beg that you will inspire action to cut emissions.

### **Warming Oceans**

Between 1971 and 2020, oceans absorbed [almost 90% of the earth’s accumulated heat](#). Scientists have long expressed concern about the impacts on ocean ecosystems, [circulation patterns](#), and sea level rise, as well as querying how long the waters can continue absorbing carbon at such levels. But recent, very rapid ocean warming has raised concern to new heights: in March of this year, the BBC [reports](#), “sea surface temperatures off the east coast of North America were as much as 13.8C higher than the 1981-2011 average.” What exactly has caused the sudden rise? And what does it mean? No one is sure – but as the authors of a recent study on how ice melt affects ocean circulation [said](#) of their findings: “*It’s yet another reason to address the climate crisis – and fast.*” Amen.

### **No Faith in Fossil Fuels Announcement**

*“As fossil fuel companies continue to overheat the planet, underinvest in renewables and explore for new oil and gas in violation of [scientific warnings](#), 31 faith institutions from the US, UK, Australia, Canada, Italy and France joined [a] ... global divestment announcement, proclaiming no faith in fossil fuels by making their assets permanently off limits to fossil fuel companies.”* This [announcement](#), made on April 20th to coincide with climate action around Earth Day, including a ‘[No Faith in Fossil Fuels’ service and pilgrimage in London](#), affected some \$2 billion of assets under management. We give thanks for the witness of these faith communities as they join others refusing to profit from the actions of fossil fuel companies and calling for a just transition and investment in alternative energy. May their announcement inspire others to act.

### **Psalms 104: 24, 30-31 (ESV)**

*“O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures ... When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works.”*

## International Biodiversity Day – From Agreement to Action

The Anglican Bishop of Oxford [recently spoke of](#) the climate and extinction crises as new ‘horsemen of the Apocalypse’. “The sixth rider,” he said, “is astride a grey horse, made of gunmetal, a machine, not a living creature ... Its work is gradual not sudden, a silent undermining of the vital web of life ... It represents the systematic destruction of nature and the natural world.”

Recognising the importance of halting and reversing this destruction, last year countries that are part of the Convention on Biodiversity signed a [landmark agreement](#), committing themselves to key targets [including](#) “30 per cent conservation of land and sea, 30 per cent restoration of degraded ecosystems, halving the introduction of invasive species, and \$500 billion/year reduction in harmful subsidies.” This year, the emphasis is on moving from words to deeds. National governments are being asked to launch their actions to implement the biodiversity framework, and there’s a list of twenty-two actions that individuals can take – from cleaning up a local area to asking businesses to source goods responsibly. Father, please accept our lament for the destruction that has already occurred – and send your Spirit to inspire action for the revival of species and ecosystems.

## Debt, Trade and Climate

Issues around international debt and trade have been less in the news – but debt and trade justice are crucial to climate action. The COVID-19 pandemic and other crises have left [an estimated 60% of low-income countries](#) – and [93% of the most climate-vulnerable countries](#) - experiencing, or at high risk of, debt distress. Countries in this situation are caught in a vicious cycle, as debt [hampers their ability to adapt](#), and climate impacts force them into further debt. A new group, the Vulnerable 20, [is calling](#) for reform of the international debt architecture to enable predictable, efficient and timely debt relief, so that vulnerable countries can fund their climate plans. We pray for the success of their, [and similar](#), campaigns.

Turning to trade, Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) provisions continue to pose a serious threat to climate action. Designed, in theory, to protect companies from practices such as arbitrary nationalisation, ISDS provisions allow companies that feel they have been treated unfairly to sue governments in secret courts. But companies [have interpreted the provisions as license to sue governments that institute policies that would affect corporate profits](#) even when these policies are made for positive reasons. One particularly problematic example is the ‘Energy Charter Treaty’ (ECT): [under its provisions, for example](#), Vattenfall, who ran nuclear power stations in Germany, sued the German government for accelerating their phase-out of nuclear power, and the [UK company Rockhopper sued the Italian government](#) for refusing permission for offshore drilling on environmental grounds. Attempts to reform the ECT [have so far been unsuccessful](#), and several countries [have decided to leave it in order to protect their climate goals](#). We pray for countries to prioritise climate policy over corporate interests, and for the reform of trade provisions to make them climate compatible.

## All change!

Sometimes when you are in the middle of change, you don’t really notice it. As we press for the greater action that is needed, it’s good to remind ourselves of where progress has already occurred:

- In the UK, vegetarian and vegan food has gone from the margins to the centre. Meat consumption [declined by 17% between 2008 and 2019](#), while [sales of vegetarian and plant-based products went up by 70%](#) in just the three years to 2020.
- The current fossil fuel divestment movement began in 2011. By [2014, institutions with \\$52 billion of assets under management](#) were committed to some form of fossil-fuel divestment. Today, the figure [is around \\$40 trillion](#). That’s more than the combined GDP of the US and China in 2020.
- The International Energy Agency has had to revise its estimates for electric vehicles multiple times [due to ‘explosive growth’ in the sector – and now predicts](#) that one in three vehicles sold in 2030 will be electric.

We give thanks for all signs of hope. And we pray, Lord, that you will inspire an acceleration of all that is positive and an end to unsustainable use of the gifts you have given us.

## **[Blessing \(from the 2nd European Ecumenical Assembly, Graz 1997. Reproduced by ECEN for Creation Time 2004\)](#)**

May God bless us with love to bring forth new life  
In the name of God, the Maker of the whole world,  
Of Jesus, our new covenant,  
And of the Holy Spirit, who opens eyes and hearts.