

December 2023 Prayer Points



“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” John 1: 1-5 (NRSVA)

As we start our prayers, we read afresh the opening words of John’s Gospel, often read at Christmas. However difficult the world’s situation may be, God’s love, power, and light remain constant and will not be overcome. Thanks be to God.

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness”

Before Christmas, we read about John the Baptist, as he wanders the desert, calling people to repentance and proclaiming the coming of Christ. The Biblical prophets speak truth to their people, pointing out injustice and calling for a world that conforms to God’s laws. As Advent begins, we give thanks for all people who have spoken and are speaking the truth about climate change, calling our society to repentance and transformation. We pray especially for Christians who will be part of COP28, whether as delegates [within a faith programme](#) or in another professional capacity. We pray, too, for Christians taking part in the many local calls to action surrounding the conference. May God guide each person’s words and deeds, so that they may fearlessly witness to truth, contribute to safeguarding our world, and manifest God’s love, justice and peace.

Inequality and injustice

The inequality among nations in terms of their responsibility for current and historic emissions is well known. A [recent report by Oxfam International in partnership with the Stockholm Environment Institute](#) also makes clear the scale of current inequality among individuals.

The report states that in 2019, people in the **top 10%** of global income, wherever they lived, had a footprint **nine times their fair share** and accounted for **50%** of all the world’s emissions. Within that, people in the **top 1%** produced **22 times their fair share** of emissions, much of it through their investment in heavily polluting industries. Indeed, the few in the **top 1%** had the same emissions as the approximately **five billion** people in the bottom 66%.

But as we know, while the wealthy are most responsible for the climate crisis, the sufferings from that crisis are often felt most severely by the poorest. The Oxfam report calls for a radical increase in equality, a move away from fossil fuels, and a reframing of the economy. Lord, we pray that you will inspire change, so that there may be a more equitable sharing of the earth’s resources, reductions in emissions, and justice for people suffering because of others’ actions.

Called to equity and justice: the loss and damage fund

Several mechanisms for increasing equity and justice are being discussed at this month’s climate talks. One is the loss and damage fund, which will help the poorest and most vulnerable countries when they suffer irreversible climate-related damage. In an unprecedented move, [the COP28 delegates agreed to operationalise the fund on the first day of the conference](#). The moment was [applauded by all in the room](#) and marks a recognition of the reality of loss and damage and the obligation of those most responsible to assist those least responsible. It is a significant step and starting point towards greater equity – something for which leaders like [the late Saleemul Huq](#) have long worked, for which many have prayed and campaigned, and for which we give thanks.

But [there is a long way to go](#): the initial funding pledges are small, no scale or cycle for replenishing the fund has been specified, there are disagreements about which countries should contribute and which receive funds, and concerns about the lack of engagement with front-line communities. In addition, many developing countries worry that the World Bank, which is [administering the fund for its first four years against their wishes](#), will not be sufficiently accessible or transparent, and [may seek to offer loans](#) that increase disaster-hit nations’ debts. We pray that this beginning may be sustained by donations at an appropriate scale and by good governance. We pray, too, that those with responsibility will consider options such as [taxes on fossil fuel companies](#), who profit from the creation of emissions, to replenish the fund.

Called to equity and justice: climate finance

At the start of COP28, France and Kenya [launched](#) a new ‘Taskforce on International Taxation to Scale up Development and Climate Action,’ [designed](#) “to bring together countries willing to explore new taxation options to raise much-needed funding for climate action and development.” Taxes on financial transactions, international shipping, and fossil-fuel companies are among the ideas being explored. We pray for this initiative.

More broadly, while the [OECD says](#) that the long-unfulfilled target of \$100 billion dollars per year has most likely finally been reached, climate-related funding remains woefully below what is necessary – and [funding for adaptation especially so, particularly in low-income countries](#). Moreover, no new climate finance target has yet been set – something that is a priority for climate-vulnerable countries. We pray for a breakthrough on funding, and especially for funding on adaptation. We pray, too, for the role of the church in these negotiations, as church representatives press for funding [that recognises both the importance of local engagement and the power of faith communities to mobilise it](#).

Time to phase out fossil fuels

Can the UN climate talks finally get language agreeing a phase-out of fossil fuels? Dr Friederike Otto, an eminent scientist who assesses the role climate change plays in extreme events, [put the imperative starkly](#): “Until we radically cut carbon emissions, extreme weather events will become more frequent and intense. That means there is a human rights imperative to phasing out fossil fuels and achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement.” She added: “Since 2021, we’ve known that no new gas and oil fields could be developed if the world is to keep warming to 1.5°C. But fossil fuel companies continue to expand their operations, ignoring the suffering of millions of people around the world, so they can make more money. Future climate negotiations need to be highly sceptical of the influence and involvement of big oil.”

A [significant number of countries oppose a phase-out](#) for various reasons, and it seems unlikely that a COP president who also heads a fossil-fuel company (and is accused of [pursuing commercial interests while meeting with governments about the COP](#)) can deliver the necessary commitment. Nonetheless, the [negotiating text on the Global Stocktake](#) contains language about the phasedown or phase-out of fossil fuels in the energy sector. The fossil-fuel lobby, its allies, and some countries that feel they need fossil fuels for development [will push](#) for no phasedown/out language, ‘phasedown’ rather than ‘phase-out’, and/or qualifications like phasing out ‘unabated’ fossil fuels, which would give scope for fuel use in the hopes that carbon capture and storage becomes available. We pray that global pressure and a sense of urgency will lead the conference to the strongest possible call for an equitable phase-out and a just transition. If that does not happen, we pray that, at the very least, COP28 will take the preparatory steps that will lead to such a commitment in the near future.

Energy efficiency

Another priority at COP28 is a commitment to increasing energy efficiency. This has been a [focus for the International Energy Association](#); in addition a [new report](#) from COP28, the International Renewable Energy Association and the Global Renewables Alliance supports calls for tripling renewable capacity and doubling energy efficiency by 2030.

Meeting efficiency targets would, [the report says](#), involve many of the shifts campaigners have long called for: the move from private cars to public transport, from passenger aviation and road-based freight to rail, the adoption of circular economy principles, improved building insulation, and efficient electric motors. We pray that the COP will make this call. We also pray that countries will put in place transport, building, and product design policies and standards to make the call a reality, despite there being some political risks. We give thanks for groups like the [Centre for Research into Energy Demand Solutions](#), which show how efficiency can be effective, equitable, and explained in ways that reduce opposition.

Birth of Hope

O little one, whose birth
The outcasts celebrated,
The powerful ignored or feared:
Grant us to see even now
The signs of your presence
Transforming our world,
Sometimes hidden, but never overcome.