



Prayer points – August 2024

'The Transfiguration of Creation'

Many churches celebrate Christ's transfiguration on the 6th of August. In the Orthodox tradition, Christ's transfiguration is linked with a sense of the importance of care for creation. As we start, we ponder Andrew Vincent Rossi's words: *"The fact that the transfigured body of Christ reveals His divinity in a flood of uncreated light, and that this same transfiguring uncreated energy streams from his face. body and clothing and illumines and transfigures the bodies of the apostles, means ... that the whole of creation is lifted up, and is meant to be lifted up, transformed and transfigured by the irresistible power of the grace of the Logos."*

Making the Olympics more sustainable

The Olympic Games are a showcase for top-level sport – but this year, organisers have also aimed to make them a [showcase for sustainability](#). To start, they [explicitly set out to halve the carbon footprint of the London and Rio Olympics](#), including both direct and indirect emissions. To accomplish this, they have – among other things - used pre-existing venues 95% of the time, [reduced embedded carbon where they did build](#), [relied primarily on renewable electricity](#), made sites accessible via public or active transport, halved emissions from catering, and ensured that [90% of equipment is reused after the games](#). The [athletes' village showcases a variety of innovations](#): wood and low-carbon concrete construction, on-site generation, geothermal heating and cooling, rainwater toilets, and even mattresses made out of recycled fishing nets.

Not everything has worked. In the face of summer heat, the decision not to use air conditioning – but to allow [delegations to bring their own](#) – [has been controversial](#). Language about being 'carbon neutral' was dropped because of concerns around offsetting – though [the Games will still fund a variety of offsetting projects](#). And, at the end of the day, the emissions remain massive – a truly sustainable Olympics [would need a different model](#). But the high-profile effort has shown that innovation and 50% reductions are possible – a key support for the Paris Agreement in the city where it was signed. We give thanks for these endeavours and pray that the learnings from these Olympics will lead to greater sustainability in other areas as well.

IPCC meeting

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [is meeting \(27 July to 2 August\) in Sofia, Bulgaria](#). One key agenda item is how its reports will [approach tipping points and high impact events](#). Another is the [timing of the IPCC's next major scientific reports](#): should they be ready in time to inform the global stocktake of emissions in 2028? In the previous meeting, China, India, and Saudi Arabia, among others, [objected to a 2028 deadline](#), and the meeting could not find consensus. The decision on these items have major implications for countries' policies and practice. Pray for wisdom and discernment in the meeting, and for the results to further a positive use of science in decision making.

Have China's emissions peaked?

[Data on China's power generation for May 2024 appear to show](#) a significant rise in use of renewables and fall in fossil fuels: indeed, they suggest coal-fired plants provided the lowest percentage of China's power generation ever recorded. The shift follows on an extraordinary – and continuing - level of investment in green technology: according to an expert [quoted in a Brisbane Times story](#), *"Each week in 2023 ... China installed as much wind and solar infrastructure as Australia does in its best year."* China is also [reducing emissions in its steel industry](#), moving from coal-fired plants to electric arc furnaces, spurred in part by EU levies on environmentally unfriendly steel.

China's emissions are still huge, but if these trends continue, they may [prove to have peaked in 2023](#), years ahead of the country's stated goal of 2030. This would be good news in absolute terms – and would also enable China to put forward more ambitious decarbonisation plans, potentially spurring other countries to develop ambitious transition plans of their own. We give thanks for China's moves to reduce fossil fuel use, pray that they continue, and pray that they inspire greater action globally.

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Preparing for the UN climate talks

In preparation for the next UN climate talks, host Azerbaijan [has set out its vision](#) “to enhance ambition and enable action, with climate finance as our top priority”. The hosts acknowledge the complexities in setting a new finance goal and have convened meetings this Autumn to try to move towards a resolution. We pray for all working on this issue, so vital for building trust among countries and enabling ambitious emissions targets to be set and met.

One proposal set out by Azerbaijan is for a [Climate Finance Action Fund](#), to be supplied with money by fossil-fuel-producing countries and companies. [While this does involve a transfer of funds from fossil-fuel producers, the amounts mentioned are tiny; contributions are voluntary](#); and, as Harjeet Singh, from the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative [has said](#), “its proposed design dangerously grants a social license for the ongoing extraction of gas, oil, and coal ... [and] is far from the robust accountability we have long demanded to hold the fossil fuel industry responsible for denying and delaying climate action.” Leading policy analyst Bob Ward [warned](#): “The Climate Finance Action Fund could be regarded as climate-washing if it is intended to alleviate the pressure to phase out oil, coal and gas.” Please pray that this proposal will not distract from movement towards a full, fast, fair and just transition, and real accountability for fossil-fuel producers.

Heat, fires, floods and storms

As we bring before God the people affected by extreme weather events, we feel afresh the need for urgent action. Following a month which included the [world’s hottest day in recorded history](#), we pray for people affected by heat in [South Asia](#), [the United States](#), the [Middle East](#), and [Europe](#); by wildfires in the [US](#), [Canada](#) and [Brazil](#); by [Typhoon Gaemi](#) and [Hurricane Beryl](#), by floods or landslides in China, [North Korea](#), [India](#), [Japan](#), [South Africa](#), [Sudan](#), and [Ethiopia](#) – and by other extreme events. Lord, be with all who are suffering, especially people whose vulnerability makes them most likely to be harmed; strengthen all who are working to help communities adapt; and grant that the pace of disasters may not inspire hopelessness and lethargy, but be a spur to compassion and effective action.

A quiet place

As we consider the climate crisis, we also pray about the wider environmental crisis. I (Maranda) have always thought of gardening as a sociable activity, undertaken with the background chatter of birds and the companionable buzz of insects. And then, recently, as I was watering some tomatoes, I realised the garden itself was silent. The birds were still audible in nearby trees. But despite the fact that our vegetables grow amidst a wildflower patch – with thistles, willow herb, burdock and late-flowering brambles providing a rich array for pollinators – there were almost no bees or hoverflies. The quiet was oppressive.

We read about the [insect apocalypse](#): a [precipitous decline in species and numbers, fuelled by climate change, pesticide use, and loss of habitats](#). But often we are lulled by the sight of a bee here or a butterfly there into thinking that things are still, somehow, all right. Will we continue on until, some day, we wake up in a truly silenced world? There are [clear steps, large and small](#), that can help insect populations recover. Creator God, help us to see where changes in our world are leading, to repent of our share in the harm, and to take action to stop the decline.

New Government in the UK

The newly elected Labour Government in the UK has started their tenure with several positive climate decisions: they have [lifted the de facto ban on onshore wind](#), [unveiled plans for an increase in both rooftop solar and solar farms](#), [increased the budget for the next renewable energy auction](#), said that they will not [defend the previous government’s decision to grant planning permission](#) to the Whitehaven coal mine, and established ‘[Great British Energy](#)’, a publicly owned energy company that will own, manage and operate clean power projects. There are still [many decisions to be made](#), areas where there may be trade-offs, and some [potentially difficult questions around licensing for North Sea oil and gas](#). Pray for wisdom and discernment as the Government makes key choices.

Closing Prayer

May the light of your presence, O Lord, fill us with a sense of your love and power, reveal to us the beauty of your creation, and inspire us to walk as people who are on holy ground.

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