

## **12<sup>th</sup> Assembly of European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN)**

**ECEN Assembly Katowice, Poland, 6-10 October 2018.**

**On the way to economic and ecological justice –**

***‘To give you a future with hope’ (Jeremiah 29:11)***

### **A gathering to share stories and experiences for our future**

The Assembly will be a particular contribution of ECEN on the way towards the UN sponsored COP 24, which is going to meet as well in Katowice in December.

**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2pm**

**Ethics and Climate Change – the challenge for Churches and faith communities. – the Rt Rev Nicholas Holtam, Bishop of Salisbury.**

### **We, people, are causing climate change**

Thank you for the invitation to speak on this important occasion. Hope in the Prophet Jeremiah includes the hope of exiles who seek the welfare of the city where God has set them, for in its welfare lies their welfare. In a consumerist society we may feel similarly at odds with the people among whom we live and for whom we have a prophetic word.

It is thirty years since the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was set up by the World Meteorological Organization and United Nations Environment Programme to provide policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation. In that time, a scientific, political and economic consensus has emerged that we human beings are a major cause of global warming and climate change. The BBC no longer need a climate change denier to balance the discussion. The argument is accepted.

The science is complicated but to put it simplistically, since the beginning of the industrial revolution we have been burning fossil fuels that took a billion years to lay down in the ground. There have been many positive benefits but we now know that consequences include global warming and more extreme weather events.

According to the World Wildlife Fund the impact of people has destroyed 50% of species in the last 40 years. It is a complex statistic to justify but the speed of destruction is increasing. Whilst we are not very keen on mosquitoes or funnel web spiders we are deeply concerned about the destruction of soils, pollinators and natural medicines and now know that environmental diversity is a key to healthy life.

We are at a new stage in human history, what some have called the ‘anthropocene’ era, in which environmental degradation, the destruction of species and use of fossil fuels is having a major negative impact on God’s creation.

### **A theological consensus has also emerged.**

According to Patriarch Bartholomew, this environmental and ecological crisis has revealed our world constitutes a seamless whole, that our problems are universally shared. He says

that a model of cooperation is what is required and not a method of competition; we must work in a collaborative and complimentary way.

Pope Francis used this theme in his encyclical *Laudato Si* – “On Care for Our Common Home”. This was addressed not just to Roman Catholics, nor Christians, nor only to people of faith or goodwill. “I wish to address every person living on this planet.”

Anglicans in the 1980’s developed what are called the Five Marks of Mission. The 5th Mark of Mission is, ‘To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.’<sup>1</sup>The Archbishop of Canterbury has recently said, “Responding to climate change is an essential part of our responsibility to safeguard God’s creation”.

The World Council of Churches and the leaders of each of our denominations have said similar.

### **Moral challenges**

So, the moral challenges facing us, start with the right use of the gift of God’s creation. What faces us is a very holistic problem about spirituality and values. We need our best brains, biggest hearted people and greatest souls to address the problems of climate change. So why do we remunerate our investment bankers more than those leading the revolution towards a carbon neutral future?

### **Personal commitments**

In the face of such great problems there is a danger of paralysis. What can I do? We have to begin with the personal and people are developing a range of lifestyle choices which seek to respond to the seriousness of our circumstances. I seek to travel by plane less and use public transport, walk and cycle more. I eat less meat and more plants and fish. I try to reduce waste and recycle what I can. There is something about living simply and with thanksgiving, reverence and wonder which is my personal commitment. It is not a burdensome duty but a joyful act of response to the gift of God’s creation.

### **Optimism and Hope**

Ban Ki Moon said the Paris Climate Change Talks in 2015 were the biggest and most complex talks of which he has been a part. At the Global Climate Action Summit (12-14<sup>th</sup> September) in San Francisco, Christiana Figueres ,who chaired Paris, said there is unstoppable momentum towards a future of prosperity, growth and clean energy through climate leadership, market forces and the digital revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom  
To teach, baptise and nurture new believers  
To respond to human need by loving service  
To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation  
To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Each church is the world's local Church. Churches provide local communities and national, and international networks of people who have the potential to act for climate justice from their values base. Because this is an issue about the care of creation it is possible for faith groups to work together so that the politicians have the democratic legitimacy to do something difficult for the good of all. People are thinking back to the turn of the millennium and 'Drop the Debt', Jubilee 2000 and the Millennium Development Goals for which the churches gave strong support.

For our politicians maintaining optimism matters to maintain morale. Around the world, cities, states and companies are committing to becoming carbon neutral by 2050 or sooner. For example, China is adding 9,500 electric busses – equivalent to London's entire fleet – every 5 weeks. In the US 50% of coal fired power stations have closed and the rate of closure has not changed despite President Trump's support for them. The Netherlands is committed to becoming a no-waste 'circular economy' by 2050.

Yet there is still a gap. This is a really difficult transition. We live in a world of alternative facts and fake news. It might be difficult to say exactly what is true but we Christians are committed to be about the truth and to be judged by the truth. Many people feel the problem of climate change and destruction of nature is so great that whatever we do is not enough.

At the Global Action Climate Summit, Mae Jemison, the first Black woman in space, quoted Helen Keller the deaf blind American (1880—1962). "If we listen to the best men and women everywhere ... they will say that science may have found a cure for most evils; but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all — the apathy of human beings." It is not a new problem. St Paul in Romans: "The good that I would I do not and that which I do I would not". Spirituality connects our beliefs and actions.

For Christians it is not optimism but hope that will give us what we need to make huge changes. Optimism is about the glass being half full rather half empty. Hope is certain even with the cross in view or when a seed is buried in the earth and has yet sprouted and grown. Biblical apocalyptic does not paralyse people but reveals the extent of the crisis and creates the opportunity to turn ourselves round to a hopeful reality.

### **Faith, Hope and Love**

Three weeks ago, the Anglican Bishop of California, Marc Andrus, was in conversation with Christiana Figueres, who chaired the Paris climate change talks. He said she had delivered a remarkable agreement. Christiana pointed up and said it was not her but God.

Faith has a distinctive and crucial contribution to make in sustaining a care of God's creation. What motivates people is not fear but love. Doing things for the love of is key to our acting for climate justice.

Three specific moral issues that stand out for the churches responding to climate change for the love of.

### **The poor**

The industrialised world has had the greatest benefits from the use of fossil fuels and it is the poor who carry the greatest burden of climate change.

The costs of mitigation and adaptation are huge. In 2006 the British economist Nicholas Stern estimated the impact of climate change would reduce gross domestic product globally by 5-20% per year. He was much criticised for over-stating the problem but now he thinks he underestimated it. We will not make progress with the Sustainable Development Goals unless we also make progress with climate change. That is why the development agencies such as the UK's Christian Aid, TearFund and CAFOD make climate justice a priority.

What do we want? Climate Justice. When do we want it? Now!

### **Our children**

There is a serious issue of inter-generational equity. Ours is the first generation that can't say we don't know about the impact of the way we are consuming the planet and we are probably the last generation to be able to act in response. Our action, and our failure to act, will have an impact on our children's children.

### **Our health and wellbeing**

This has been the world's hottest year on record. There has been a dramatic rise in extreme weather events. We have just had Super Typhoon Mangkhut battering the Philippines and Hurricane Florence the USA. If we fail to act for climate justice we will all be impacted.

In the northern hemisphere this summer there have been wild fires in Greece and California in which thousands of homes were destroyed. The high temperatures have had an impact on mortality rates across the globe.

Air pollution in cities is causing increasing concern. One of the reasons China is making rapid progress is because the impact of pollution on health is such as to have a very negative impact on mortality and what we would call the common good.

### **Belief and action go together**

It is an obvious truism but the Archbishop of Canterbury recently pointed to the importance of us doing what we say we believe.

With the Christian environmental charity A Rocha we have developed Ecochurch as a way for local churches in England and Wales to engage with the care of God's creation. Over a thousand churches have registered and are working for bronze, silver and gold awards.

Over 2,000 churches, church schools and church buildings have made the Big Shift to purchasing renewable energy.

There are over 6,000 Living Churchyards encouraging biodiversity.

Etc., etc.

In ways that have to me been surprisingly inspiring, the Church of England has aligned its investments with our beliefs about the care of creation, using the Church's investments to influence for good. We have a policy of divestment from the most polluting – coal and tar sands (2015); engagement with fossil fuel companies to align with the Paris agreement; and investment in renewables.

By partnership with the Environment Agency and The Grantham Institute at the London School of Economics the Transitions Pathway Initiative has been created, a consortium of organisations with assets under management of \$30 trillion. This is having a major impact on companies to align with the Paris agreement to decarbonise.

### **Renewing Hope**

In my own Diocese of Salisbury I asked about the issues that face us, including the very gradual but almost constant decline in attendance and giving. I suggested that if I were the CEO of a large organisation with many local branches I would close the 20% worst performers. There was no appetite for that.

Instead we decided we wanted to renew hope across the diocese by asking three questions of every Christian, parish church, deanery... and every organisation within the diocese.

What do you pray for?  
Whom do you serve?  
How will you grow?

The responses have informed our actions. They are good questions for us to ask in these three days, particularly because we will find in them infinitely renewable energy.

It is a well-known story that Martin Luther said if the world was falling to pieces he would plant an apple tree. We should be doing similarly hopeful things that teach us and our communities how to live sustainably in this wonderful creation.