

## Report to Exeter Diocesan Synod 18<sup>th</sup> March 2017

There are a number of entry points into the discussion on Climate Change: science, economics, politics, psychology and more. But I want to invite us this morning to begin this conversation with theology.

Our Christian faith, it can be said, stands on two pillars of doctrine: **Creation** and **Incarnation**, and they are both strongly linked. Our understanding of **Creation** encourages us to take seriously the Holiness of the Earth. This planet is created through an evolving process in which we are partners with God and the living world itself. This covenantal relationship pushes us to be servants (even priests) as the full **Creation** reveals the glory of God, and our human role is especially to pass on the preciousness of life to future generations.

Our belief in the **Incarnation** sees God take human form and engage with the planet and all its ecological workings. Jesus is born of a woman, grows into adulthood, drinks, eats, works, and lives with the same molecules and minerals that sustain us today. This is not other worldly. And we are called to bring about in the here and now that Kingdom/Reign of God which Jesus made a living reality two thousand years ago. **Incarnation** illustrates a Gospel of justice and mercy, especially for the broken and vulnerable, and which brings about a peaceful integrity for the whole inhabited Earth.

These are the kinds of insights which motivate our national '**Shrinking the Footprint**' campaign and have brought this Synod to debate Climate Change five times in the last ten years. The call to protect the poor, the planet and the future underlines our strategic approach and the actions which are summarised in the paper you have in front of you this morning. [Paper S/03/2017]

We are people of faith attempting to make sense of Global Warming and the need to radically re-examine our lifestyles if we are to move towards a low carbon world and not to climate catastrophe.

Scientifically today, the global consensus on Climate Change has strengthened with increasing evidence of oceans warming, polar ice melting, extreme weather, species migrations and so on.

Politically, the Paris agreement at COP 21 in December 2015 has been ratified with an extremely demanding aspiration of keeping international average temperature rises to 1.5 degrees.

We are now living in a '*time of consequences*' (Churchill) with millions of people in more fragile communities and countries being faced with climate uncertainties. This includes people being displaced because land no longer supports them e.g. Middle East, and is a major contributory factor to the world refugee crisis.

Through our Diocesan overseas links we know of those being forced to move from islands in Melanesia, leave family farms in Thika and face water stress in Cyprus. On a different level in Devon, there are growing problems with flash flooding, land and coastal erosion, storm damage and loss of species.

The challenges of Climate Change are very real and the need to phase out our use of fossil fuels paramount.

Therefore the Shrinking the Footprint is the national campaign to reduce Church of England's carbon footprint by 42% by 2020 and 80% by 2050, in line with previous government targets.

After our previous Diocesan synod debates, a ten year strategic plan was adopted in 2010 by BDC for Diocesan action (BDC67/10) and highlights 5 key priority areas of ministry:

1. How and where we source our energy needs in the Diocese – moving hopefully towards more sustainable and local suppliers
2. Reducing the carbon footprint of our land and buildings – churches, schools, houses, etc.
3. Our transport footprint – not easy given the geographical nature and spread of Devon
4. Our personal, congregational and community lifestyles as we transition towards a low carbon society
5. Underpinning all these is how we deepen our understanding and relationship with God as the Creator of life

Some of the highlights of progress in this time include:

- Eco Church South West partnership with 7 Dioceses and Ecotricity leading to over 400 renewable energy installations
- EcoChurch SW website ([www.ecochurchsouthwest.org.uk](http://www.ecochurchsouthwest.org.uk))
- Fair and local food supplies – Fairtrade Diocese
- Devon & Cornwall Food Association rescues and redistributes good food saving (£1 million) and 120 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>
- More than one hundred church buildings on 100% green electricity and gas users
- Campaigns such as Blue Wave (2009) and Parliamentary Climate Lobby (2015)
- Climate action with overseas partner Dioceses (Thika/Melanesia)
- 3 Lent Carbon Fasts
- Promotion of Season of Creation resources and services
- Partnership with DARE (Devon Association for Renewable Energy)
- Survey of Diocesan parsonages with action plan recommendations for 20% savings in CO<sub>2</sub> use by 2020
- Devon Inter-faith green network (DEFAN) and activities (60 people)
- Staff travel plan at the Old Deanery
- Composting toilets at 8 churches
- Devon Living Churchyards initiative
- Launch of Devon EcoChurch and EcoDiocese (14 registered)

Our STF work is still in progress and there are further areas of action to pursue:

- reporting to Diocesan Synod and gauging developments to date
- reconstitute StF working group to oversee final four years of strategy and Archidiaconal recommendations
- review post of Diocesan Environment Officer (DEO)
- prioritise Exeter becoming an Eco-Diocese and developing more Ecochurches in Devon (through A Rocha)

I conclude that our covenantal relationship with God calls us to protect and preserve the web of life and to live justly and with respect for the whole Creation. It is well expressed in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Marks of Mission - though at times we do not recognise the urgency and depth of the challenge.

StF is not an extra add-on for Christian churches because our human relationship with the Earth (our Common Home) is an integral part of our mission and ministry. How we mitigate against, and adapt to, Climate Change demonstrates our sharing of God's love in the world at this important *kairos* time.

In the words of former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon: *We are the first generation to be able to end poverty, and the last generation that can take steps to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Future generations (and God) will judge us harshly if we fail to uphold our moral and historical responsibilities...*

**Martyn Goss, Diocesan Environment Officer**

