

How to make climate change an issue that churches address

*An ideas paper for the Church of England's Environment Working Group
The Rt Revd Dr Richard Cheetham, Bishop of Kingston*

January 2015

Get the theology – orthodoxy and orthopraxis - right. Show how it flows directly from the Gospel. +David Atkinson identifies an implicit dualism in much Christian thinking suggesting that the material world is not important to God. We need to reframe this in a compelling theology of creation, providence, salvation and eschatology and a robust approach to mission and discipleship. We need to emphasise that ecological commitments are 21st Century expressions of Christian identity, lifestyle and concern. They are not secular issues, or additional to Christian witness and faith; people need a language to express them, and a lifestyle/spirituality to embody them, in terms of their faith. What is done in theological colleges, IME and CME and lay training?

Get the psychology right. George Marshall's book, 'Don't even think about it', suggests that we are hard-wired not to think about about such large-scale, overwhelming issues because they are too big and difficult. Prof Chris Rapley has also written about the unconscious processes which drive most of our responses. To get a deep culture shift we need to understand these processes and how to deal with them. Ways of doing this are reflected in the suggestions below.

Link climate change closely with the Justice and Poverty agenda including the debate over global economics, growth and finance. Many Christians, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, are deeply committed to the Justice and Poverty agenda. Climate action is – and needs to be seen as – integral to this. We need to address, as part of our discipleship, the injustices arising from our consumer culture.

Embed climate change and environment issues in our regular liturgy. Previous suggestions for a special focus on climate change and the environment around Harvest time, and an extended period of Creationtide, are a good start. But the focus also needs to be embedded in our hymnody, preaching, worship all year round, and linked to key themes of Resurrection Hope, the Holy Spirit, Incarnation, Eschatology.

Ensure a good link with schools and universities. Many church schools are committed to environmental issues, and much key research is done in universities. We could draw on the expertise of specialists.

Make sure there are good conversations at parish, deanery and diocesan level about how this impacts the life of our parishes. It is not about reinventing the wheel or churches doing their own thing; it is about working together for future generations.

Use the excellent material already available. E.g. "Shrinking the Footprint", the "Climate Change Action in Church" produced by the Diocese of Exeter, materials on websites of A Rocha, Green Christian, Operation Noah, the John Ray Initiative, Christian Aid, Tearfund etc

Make good use of the events in 2015. Especially the Pope's Encyclical, Paris meeting.

Shaping the Church's response to Environmental issues

*The Rt Revd Dr Richard Cheetham
Bishop of Kingston June 2019*

