



A four-week course
for parishes &
other groups

CHRISTIANITY & CREATION GREEN DISCIPLESHIP FOR CORNWALL



DIOCESE OF TRURO
DISCOVERING GOD'S KINGDOM
GROWING THE CHURCH

Week 1: Crisis, what crisis?

Most Christians know that the natural world which God created is being damaged, even destroyed, in many places across the world and many of us as Christians have a sense that this is something we want to do something about.

But the problems can seem so vast and the contributions that we can make so small that the temptations to remain frozen into inaction or to turn our attention to seemingly 'easier' problems can be overwhelming.

But as Christians we stand in an honourable tradition of those who have faced supposedly insuperable evils and, with God's help, have created a better future for all. Christian opposition to slavery and apartheid are two examples —perhaps you can think of others.

Like our Christian forebears, we stand a better chance of making a difference if our discipleship is properly informed and if we work together to tackle the issues that face us.

That is what this course aims to do.

In the first week, we shall gain an overview of the challenges, including a brief (but hopefully comprehensible!) look at the scientific consensus around the multiple issues of environmental degradation.

Week two will explore the biblical resources available to us in the church, revealing for us, perhaps for the first time, the concern for the natural world that runs throughout the biblical witness.

In week three we look at the responses that Christians have made so far, practically and theologically, to these challenges. Again, this might come as a surprise to some as we discover that Christian concern for the natural environment is not as new as we might have thought.

Week four encourages us to take those responses into our own lives and our own churches and explores the resources that are available to us specifically within Cornwall and the Diocese of Truro to do that.

Suggestions are provided for an optional 'fifth week', which could be used either as the final week of the course itself, or could perhaps form part of a PCC meeting or parish awayday, to help you to make the discussions even more specific to your particular church and circumstances.

We hope you find the course stimulating and useful and that through its use you and your church may find new ways to bless the world in which we all live.

Revd Elly Sheard, course author, and a member of the Diocese of Truro's Environment Core Group (with thanks to Revd Dr Lucy Larkin, on whose work much of this course is based).

WEEK 1: CRISIS, WHAT CRISIS?

There are a huge number of interconnecting aspects to the environmental crisis which the world faces.

As an introductory exercise, ask each member of the group to offer one particular 'environmental problem' that is of particular concern to them - and ask them to briefly say why ...

Although Climate Change is crucially important to the health and stability of the natural world, it is by no means the only issue, as the introductory exercise has probably shown.

The ecological crisis has traditionally been understood as being made up of the following:

- Climate change, sea level rise, migration;
- Species extinction/habitat destruction/loss of biodiversity;
- Waste/pollution;
- Land degradation (deforestation, soil erosion, urbanization);
- Population growth;
- Shortage of resources—food, energy, land, water etc.

We look at each of these in turn this week, but inevitably this session contains only a very superficial overview of the issues. There is a huge amount of relevant information on the internet, easily accessed by just a brief search which leaders and participants may like to investigate either before or after the session.

first we open with a short Bible reading and a prayer.

Read Jeremiah 12: 10—13 and pause for a few moments of silent reflection

Prayer

Creator God,
breathing your own life into being,
you gave us the gift of life:
you placed us on this earth with its minerals and waters,
flowers and fruits, living creatures of grace and beauty.
You gave us the care of the earth.
Teach us, creator God of love,
that the earth and all its fullness are yours,
the world and all who dwell in it.
Call us yet again, to safeguard the gift of life.
Amen



CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Change is assessed globally by the IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change). The IPCC is a scientific, international and inter-governmental body (195 countries, 1,300 scientists) set up under the auspices of the United Nations to assess the science related to climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation. See their website: www.ipcc.ch

The IPCC does not carry out its own original research or monitor the climate itself but bases its assessments on published scientific literature.

IPCC assessments are written by hundreds of leading scientists who volunteer their time and expertise. Their reports undergo multiple rounds of drafting and review to ensure they are comprehensive and objective and produced in an open and transparent way. Thousands of other experts contribute to the reports by acting as reviewers, ensuring the reports reflect the full range of views in the scientific community.

For some time now, the IPCC have said that:

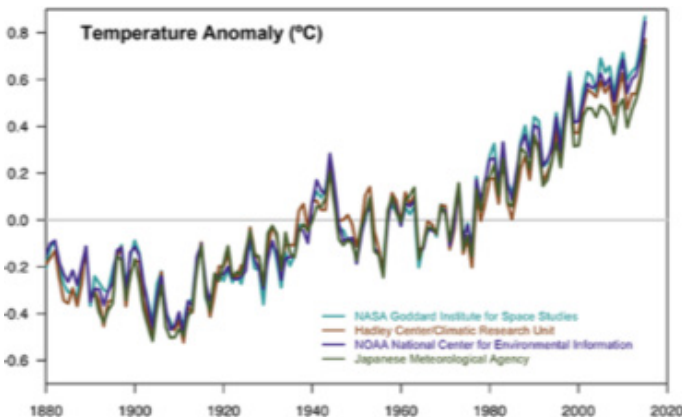
- Climate change is happening.
- It is human induced.
- It will affect the poor and disadvantaged the most.
- We need to do something about it now.
- There is hope if humanity gets its act together.

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

What do you make of these findings?

Do you think they constitute a crisis?

How does this situation make you feel?



Temperature data from four international science institutions. All show rapid warming in the past few decades and that the last decade has been the warmest on record.



SPECIES EXTINCTION AND HABITAT LOSS

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has a 'red list' of critically endangered species. It includes:

- 40% of amphibians
- 25% of mammals
- 14% of birds
- 33% of reef building corals
- 34% of conifers
- Orang-utans are just one example

But there is also some good news. In an amazing show of progress for wildlife, in 2018 Nepal was on track to become the first of the world's countries to double its wild tiger population since 2010. An estimated 235 wild tigers - nearly twice the number of tigers counted in 2009 - lived in this small Himalayan country, according to the results of a 2018 WWF tiger survey.

Population Growth

There are several world population counters on the internet (eg: worldometers.info/world-population). The figures below give an indication of the scale of the problem:

World Population

1800: 1 billion

2020: 7, 758,156,792

2050: 9.5 billion?

We suggest you continue through to the next page without comment as yet ...



WASTE, POLLUTION & LAND DEGRADATION

Up to 12m tonnes of plastic ends up in the sea each year. This includes tiny bits of plastic from cosmetics, bathroom products and tyres. Sea creatures can get tangled up in plastic or mistake it for food. The effects can be fatal. Harmful chemicals linked to plastic have been found in species from plankton to dolphins.

Severe land degradation affects a significant portion of the Earth's arable lands, decreasing the wealth and economic development of nations. As the land resource base becomes less productive, food security compromised, competition for dwindling resources increases and the seeds of famine and potential conflict are sown.

Significant land degradation from seawater inundation, particularly in river deltas and on low-lying islands, is a potential hazard that has been identified in successive IPCC reports. Deforestation affects the earth's ability to mitigate climate change.

Indoor air pollution and poor urban air quality are two of the world's worst toxic problems. According to the 2014 World Health Organization, air pollution in 2012 caused the deaths of around 7 million people worldwide.

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

Do you have any personal experience of any of these issues?

Have you taken any steps yourself to combat or mitigate any of them?

The examples given here are just for illustration. Are there any others under this heading that you think we should have included?

SHORTAGE OF RESOURCES - ENERGY, FOOD, WATER ETC

According to UNICEF 663 million people lack access to clean drinking water and 2.4 billion lack hygienic sanitation facilities. Nearly half of all deaths of children under 5 are attributable to malnutrition. World wide, children make up nearly half of the almost 900 million people living on less than US\$1.90 a day.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, it takes 1,500 litres of water to produce 1kg of cereal and 15,000 litres to produce 1kg of beef.

Some experts contend that cotton is the largest user of water among all agricultural commodities. Surface and ground waters are often diverted to irrigate cotton fields, whilst runoff of pesticides, fertilizers, and minerals from cotton fields contaminates rivers, wetlands, and underground aquifers.

In countries where water is scarce exports that require a lot of water to grow (cotton, wheat, some fruit and vegetables) may mean that 'virtual water' is exported to water-rich countries, possibly leaving water-poor countries in deprivation.

The current consensus among recognized estimates is that peak extraction of world oil reserves will occur in 2020. Beyond this point of 'peak oil', the world's stock of extractable oil reserves will diminish, prices will rise sharply and shortages will become more likely. However, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency, in 2019, a third of global power capacity is now based on renewable energy - so it's not all bad news, although much still remains to be done.

“ Does this generation have the right to use up all the fossil fuel in the world, erode its topsoil ... and destroy tropical forest in order to enable a fifth of the world's population to live in affluence? ”

Sean McDonagh SSC 'The Death of Life'



SO HOW DO WE RESPOND?

In a sense, the whole of this course seeks to address this question, but pause here for a moment and reflect on how we feel we should respond. What feelings does the environmental crisis raise for us? What steps are group members already taking, individually or as families, to 'do their bit' for the environment? What can we do as churches or as a wider society? There will not be time to explore these questions fully here, but it is worth spending a few moments to begin considering them.

CLOSING REFLECTION & PRAYER

"The real crisis is not in the environment but in the human heart. The fundamental problem is to be found not outside but inside ourselves, not in the ecosystem but in the way we think. The root cause of all our difficulties consists in human selfishness and human sin. What is asked of us is not greater technological skill but deeper repentance, metanoia, in the literal sense of the Greek word, which signifies 'change of mind.' The root cause of our environmental sin lies in our self-centeredness and in the mistaken order of values, which we inherit and accept without any critical evaluation. We need a new way of thinking about our own selves, about our relationship with the world and with God. Without this revolutionary 'change of mind,' all our conservation projects, however well-intentioned, will remain ultimately ineffective. For we shall be dealing only with the symptoms, not with their cause."

From an address by Patriarch Bartholomew I of the Orthodox Church, 2002

Prayer

Against the dark backdrop of infinite space, our planet appears so small, so vulnerable.

Guide us, dear God, that we may cherish your earth and the life it sustains with the best of our energies, intelligence, imagination and love.

And may your great, vulnerable, life-giving Spirit guide our every coming and our every going that we may act justly, love kindly and walk humbly in the company and friendship of you, our God, now and always.

Amen

To ponder this week:

Read Psalm 104, perhaps a few verses at a time, followed by the reflection above from the Orthodox Church. How do you feel as you set these texts side by side? Take your feelings to God in prayer and ask Him to show you both the blessings of his creation as it surrounds you and the ways in which He is calling you to love and care for it better.

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