

Introducing Climate Sunday by Andy Atkins

Over the last few months, UK churches have responded to the Covid-19 crisis with compassion, courage, sacrifice and innovation, to show the love of Christ in practical ways. I'm not always proud of the Church, but I've been moved and excited to see it - us - stepping up in this way.

Sadly, though, Covid-19 is not the only or even the biggest crisis out there. The climate crisis has been creeping up on the world for decades, and time to prevent widespread chaos and loss of life is running out. That's why a broad coalition of Christian charities and denominations has today launched the *Climate Sunday* initiative - to make it easy for all churches to take action, together, in what will be a critical year ahead.

The Covid-19 pandemic may have led to the postponement of the UN climate conference (COP26), originally scheduled for November this year, but it has not cancelled the climate crisis. The drop in greenhouse gas emissions during the economic shut down will make no real difference long term if we return to business as usual. Two years ago the world's leading scientists of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that humanity had just over a decade to cut emissions of greenhouse gasses steeply if we were to have even a 50/50 chance of keeping global temperature rise under 1.5 degrees above the pre-industrial average. Yet by early 2020, just before the pandemic, the world remained firmly on course to *overshoot* this goal by several degrees. We were, and still are, heading for global climate catastrophe; and time to avoid it is exceedingly short.

Amidst the still unfolding tragedy of Covid-19 there are positives we can grasp and apply to climate change: those countries that acted early on good science have suffered much less; governments and people are capable of extraordinarily rapid and radical action if they understand the need.

For many churches, action on climate change is not new. Quietly but in ever growing numbers, over the last few years local churches across denominations and styles of worship have been responding to this moral issue with creativity and determination. More than 3,400* local churches are now registered with the main church greening schemes. But with the climate crisis accelerating and the UK due to host the rescheduled COP26 climate talks in November 2021 in Glasgow, we believe the time has come for *all* churches across the UK to pray about and act on the climate crisis, as we have done in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our vision as a coalition is to see God's love and desire for justice manifested through the church on this critical issue of our age. The need and the opportunity are great. They include bringing pastoral support to a younger generation already experiencing climate anxiety and grief; teaching of God's love for all his creation; reducing carbon emissions from church buildings, land, congregational travel and purchasing; serving the local community by taking part in practical projects, such as restoring local green space, to help them adapt; and witnessing to our God of Justice by joining wider civil society calls for a fair transition to a sustainable economy.

The idea is very simple. We are calling on all churches to hold a local Climate Sunday any time during a one year period starting on 6th September 2020 (the first Sunday in the annual season of Creationtide). We will provide free resources to suit every tradition and style of worship. During their local Climate Sunday, we invite each church to do one or more of three things:

- **Climate service:** Hold a climate-focused service, to explore the theological and scientific basis of creation care and action on climate, to pray, and to commit to action
- **Commit:** Make a commitment as a local church community to taking long term action to reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Call:** Join with other churches and wider society by adding their name to a common call for the UK government to take much bolder action on climate change in *this* country in advance of COP26, and to strengthen its credibility to lead the international community to adopt a step change in action at COP26.

Then, two months before the COP talks in Glasgow, on Sunday 5th September 2021, we will hold a national Climate Sunday event to celebrate the commitments made by churches at local level over the previous year. We will also present the UK government with the combined commitments and calls which all local churches have made - to show our political leaders that they will have our support to act boldly, justly and compassionately on this issue.

We cannot guarantee the outcome of COP26, but whether it is successful or not, the current pace of climate disruption will still require individuals and whole sectors of society to act fast - out of fairness to those locked in poverty, those who need more support to face the effects of climate change, the young and all future generations, as well as to the rest of nature. Only we Christians, and our church communities, can only do this for ourselves; no-one else can do it for us. As followers of a loving and Creator God, we should be the sector of society most prepared to act first, boldly, in faith and service.

The Climate Sunday initiative is there to help us in this critical year ahead for climate and the UK's international leadership. It will help us take our next steps as local Christian communities, on this moral, pastoral, economic and environmental issue of our generation. And it will help us do it together, to learn from each other and to multiply our combined impact for good nationally and even internationally

From today we invite every single UK church community to take part. You can register to receive more information and start planning your local Climate Sunday [here](#).

Andy Atkins,

CEO of A Rocha UK, Chair of the Climate Sunday Steering Group

Climate Sunday is being organised by the CTBI's Environmental Issues Network (EIN). This gathers the environmental 'leads' of the major denominations, some Christian orders, and the Christian environmental and relief and development agencies. Member organisations which have already given their formal backing to the initiative include CAFOD, Christian Aid, Tearfund, A Rocha UK, Operation Noah, Climate Stewards, Eco-Congregation Scotland, Green Christian, the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Baptist Union of Wales, the United Reformed Church, The Church of Scotland, Cytûn (Churches together in Wales), the Union of Welsh Independents and the Church in Wales.

** By 31 May., more than 3,400 of the UK's 50,000 churches were members of one of the following schemes: Eco Church (England and Wales) 2,800; Eco Congregation Scotland 500 and Ireland; Live Simply (Catholic Churches in England and Wales) 120 parishes.*