

Climate Sunday: giving a voice to local churches

Marking World Environment Day, an initiative is launched today to provide focus for churches from across Britain and Ireland committed to action to combat climate change. Climate Sunday has been organised by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland with support from charities including CAFOD, Christian Aid, Tearfund, A Rocha UK, and Operation Noah.

Local churches are encouraged to hold a local Climate Sunday any time during a one-year period starting on 6th September (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:

1. **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.
2. **Commit:** Make a commitment as a local church community to taking long term action to reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions.
3. **Call:** Join with other churches and wider society by adding its 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. The culmination of the campaign will be a national Climate Sunday event on Sunday 5th September 2021, to share church commitments and pray for bold action and courageous leadership at COP26.

Chief Executive of A Rocha UK, Andy Atkins, and chair of the coalition, said:

“With the climate crisis accelerating and the UK due to host the 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 is to leave a lasting legacy of thousands of UK churches better equipped to address this critical issue as part of their normal discipleship and mission; and to make a very significant contribution to civil society efforts to secure adequate national and international action at the COP26 conference.”

Director of Global Advocacy at Tearfund, Dr Ruth Valerio, author of *Saying Yes to Life: The Archbishop of Canterbury's 2020 Lent Book*, said:

“The current crisis has changed the way we see the world. It has reminded us of the fragility of life, exposed the gap between rich and poor, and revealed the damage we’ve done to the wider creation. But it has also helped us love our neighbours and brought communities together. Climate Sunday is a great opportunity to respond to these societal shifts; to pause and reimagine what life could be like; to commit to living differently ourselves and to call on the UK government to rebuild our economy in a way that tackles the climate emergency and builds a better world for everyone.”

The Bishop of Salisbury, the Right Reverend Nicholas Holtam, the bishop responsible for the environment for the Church of England, said:

“Although our focus has been shifted from climate change in recent months by the challenges of responding to COVID-19, the climate crisis has not gone away, and the driest May since records began is a timely reminder of this. Climate Sunday will be a brilliant resource to help Church of England parishes understand and respond to the climate crisis. As we work out the actions we need to take to cut our carbon emissions every year to reach net zero emissions by 2030, Climate Sunday will motivate, encourage and inspire our churches to keep going on this journey.”

Bishop of Salford, Bishop John Arnold, the bishop responsible for the environment for the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales, said:

"We need to recognise the damage we're doing to the environment and our failure to look after our brothers and sisters in our common home. "In a post-pandemic world, the Climate Sunday project is an excellent opportunity for Catholic parishes in England and Wales, as well as our ecumenical brothers and sisters, to understand responsibility to heal our planet and to pray and act in response to the climate emergency."

Mary Sweetland, Chairperson of Eco-Congregation Scotland, an ecumenical charity supporting 500 Scottish churches of all denominations in environmental activities, said:

"We need to take action as Christians who care for God's creation, tackling the climate emergency with urgency now and for future generations. When we welcome thousands from around the world, online or in person to COP26, we can all demonstrate that we are taking action and leading by example in our own church and across the UK. We all share a unique opportunity in the year ahead for transformational change, taking practical steps to change our own behaviour and calling on governments to agree global action when they gather in Glasgow. Climate Sunday helps link this directly with our spiritual life, focusing local churches on the environment in worship, prayer and action."

Revd Judith Morris, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Wales, said:

"Climate Sunday is a crucial opportunity for all churches to take much needed action to address one of the most urgent and pressing issues facing our planet. As stewards of God's creation, it is paramount that we actively engage with climate change and commit to protecting the future for generations to come. We need to make changes before it is too late and we hope that this initiative will galvanize all Christians in Wales into action."

To register for Climate Sunday visit the website: www.climatesunday.org

Find out more about the initiative by reading this blog by Andy Atkins, CEO of A Rocha UK and Chair of the Climate Sunday Steering Group: www.climatesunday.org/blog

Ends

Notes for editors:

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.

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