



## **Climate and pastoral care: processing grief for the planet**

Here you can find resources to help you consider how we can be further equipped to acknowledge and face issues of grief and loss around climate change in our church communities; and to help us identify resources for how we can do this. This resource has been produced by A Rocha UK.

This resource packet includes:

- A short introduction to the issue
- Advice for holding a climate and pastoral care focused service, including a section exploring lament and guidance for supporting communities pastorally
- Suggestions for committing to long term action
- Campaigns to support calling for a greener future
- Further resources

### **A short introduction to climate grief and pastoral care**

We may feel a deep sense of grief when we think about our broken relationship with nature, and the ways this is seen in our world today: biodiversity loss, wildfires, record breaking temperatures, glaciers melting - to name but a few. We may feel grief about what we have already lost, and what we stand to lose in the future, as we think of species that face extinction in the next decades and people displaced by climate change.

It is clear now that there are far reaching mental health impacts from climate change, with phrases like climate grief and eco-anxiety now commonplace. We may experience grief, anxiety, trauma and stress - not just as Christians thinking about creation care and God's earth, but all of humankind. We don't have many words for climate grief in the English language, but a good analogy is the sense of being homesick whilst you're still at home. Concern in the face of this threat to our future is totally understandable, but when it becomes anxiety or grief with nowhere to go, it can be deeply debilitating.

We therefore need to be more equipped in our churches to acknowledge and face this sense of loss and grief around the environmental crisis, and to offer support to our congregations and communities. Churches can play a vital role in providing pastoral care for climate grief. The Church has much experience of living with suffering, providing compassion and resources for people to face mortality – as well as to persevere in seeking a more just future. So, just as local churches have responded with pastoral care and support for those affected by the covid crisis, so they will increasingly need to respond with pastoral care to those suffering from the environmental crisis.

Churches have rich resources to draw from. They can provide a space for both lament and hope; a place for people to grieve and express their emotions, but also a place for action - to engage in local wildlife and allotment projects, to offer prayer and counselling services, to provide a safe space for the community to discuss the future it wants, as well as demanding accountability from our institutions and governments on its response to the environmental crisis.

# Climate Service - Hosting a Climate and Pastoral Care themed service

## Lament as a pastoral response to climate grief:

*With many thanks to Hannah Malcolm for her session on lament as part of the Climate and Pastoral Care: processing grief for the planet online webinar hosted by A Rocha UK.*

Lament is a form of prayer, helping us explore what faith means in the bleak places where there isn't a clear quick fix or simple answer.

Lament is directed to God, and holds an openness towards the future, acknowledging that we as humans don't know all the outcomes. It is a collective work, a community rhythm, shaped by our own experiences and the experiences of others. Lament is sorrow, rage, protest - just as we see Jesus weep and call out to God for change, so can we. Lament and protest are essential parts of prayer; not just for the grieving, but a stance we can take in a world that suffers, where we don't have to have an emotional response ourselves in order to join in with lament.

Lamentation brings us to wise action - humility about our human selves and our knowledge. In despair, we assume we know what will happen. Lament is different from despair, and should not leave us or others in distress. Rather, lament is speech to God, acknowledging an unknown future and fearing the lord more than the powers of this world.

Lament requires pastoral responsibility - we must avoid treating lament as a one off event, to bring about a grief response in those around us. Rather, it is about lamenting being at the heart of our community, and is conducted knowing that God hears us.

Lament should therefore bring about works of life for us. It invites us to heal in the face of brokenness, and to life in the face of death.

## Resources around lament:

- [Time for Tears](#) an article by Engage Worship about engaging with grief, sorrow, and pain in worship
- [Part 2 - Learning to Lament | Exploring Prayer](#) a helpful video by Archbishop Justin Welby about how to pray when we see things in the world that are painful or difficult

## Resources for a service:

As Hannah Malcolm explains in her work, considering climate grief may cause people to feel overwhelmed or distressed. Hannah speaks about this more in the podcast episode 'Ecological Grief', available [here](#). We are therefore not suggesting that talking about climate grief or lament is a one off event - it is not about getting people to a heightened emotional state and then leaving them there at the end of the service. Rather, it's about ongoing pastoral care around emotions people may be feeling in response to the climate crisis. Focusing on lament is more about a heart attitude in our collective lives as church communities; of prayer and lament for the broken places in our world being an ongoing thing that we cry out to God about.

As part of this, here are some resources for different elements of a church service that may be useful surrounding this topic:

- **Activities to use in worship individually or corporately** – for all age services, kids or adults
  - [Ashes of lament](#) - an active/physical idea that could be easily focused on climate
  - [God who sees and hears](#) - an accessible version of lament with physical movement, easily adapted to refer to environment/extinction/creation care

- **Stories** – of experience and impact people can share on the issue, in sermons or worship
  - Zoe Matties shared about a healing experience of communal lament in the webinar [Ecological Grief and Exploring Hope: A Panel Discussion](#) hosted by A Rocha Canada, touching on lament in particular at 00:46:00, and asking the questions of: what is lament? How do we practice it? Are there rituals? Is it healing? Can it be done as a communal activity?
  
- **Poems** - sharing a poem could be a poignant way to encapsulate the emotions we find hard to put into words around climate grief
  - When Great Trees Fall - Maya Angelou
  - I thank you God for this most amazing day - E.E Cummings
  
- **Prayers** – for particularly times in services (intercession, adoration, confession, dedication) or for individual prayer
  - [Lamentation Prayers](#) gathered by Green Christian
  - [An Environment Confession](#) from Engage Worship
  - [26 Prayers for the Climate and Ecological Emergency](#) from St George’s Church in Leeds
  - [Liturgies and prayers](#) from Christian Climate Action
  - [A Communal Prayer for Climate Grief](#) from Christian Climate Action
  - [The Joy in Enough Confession](#) from Green Christian
  - [A Climate Office](#) written by Andii Bowsler from Green Christian
  - [Time To Act](#) “Liturgies, Prayers and Declarations” (page 264)
  
- **Hymns and songs** – for individual or corporate worship
  - Engage Worship have many resources around lament on their website [here](#). Specific resources for climate grief and lament can be found [here](#).
  - [The Porter’s Gate: Lament Songs](#) - this collection of lament songs is a small addition to the tradition of Christians bringing the brokenness of this world to God in prayer and song.
  - [Doxecology](#) - an album by Resound Worship of ecologically themed worship songs, touching on creation, ecology, and Christian hope. There is also a [study guide](#) to go alongside the album.
  - Hymns: [The Garden of the World](#) by Sheila Erena Murray, [Now We Hear Creation Groaning](#) by Martin Leckebusch, and [Dido’s Lament](#) by Annie Lennox
  - [Harvest Worship - Church Service pack](#) - Creation intercession video, focusing on lament on page 26
  
- **Sermons and Liturgy** - to equip congregations and leaders to hold a climate focused service.
  - [Eucharist Liturgy](#) from All Saints Church, Durham
  - [Creation Liturgy](#) from All Hallows Leeds
  - [Sermons, Homilies, Prayers](#) gathered by Hannah Malcolm
  - [Doxecology Study Guide](#) from Engage Worship, which includes three unique service plans: The Beauty of Creation, The Cry of Creation and The Hope of Creation, with song suggestions, prayers, all-age activities, and more
  
- **Videos** – which can be used in services or shared online.
  - A lament for the Climate and Ecological Emergency, available [here](#).

## **Holding a service outside:**

You might consider holding a service outside for an extra layer of connectedness with nature. As Luan Huska writes in her blog post [Healing and the Earth](#): 'being out in the natural world is a balm for many. Under a cathedral of trees or in the holy silence of the desert we sense our oneness with all that God has made. We are not alone. We are accompanied in our joy and pain not just by other humans but by daffodils, ladybugs, and sugar maples. So we tend to the earth as part of our healing.'

See Engage Worship's [Worship in the Woods: Church Service Pack](#), giving ten sessions of engaging with God in the woods. They also have other resources about holding a service outside available [here](#).

See also Tearfund's resource for their [Prayer in the Park](#) initiative. Prayer in the Park happened on the 5th of June on World Environment Day before world leaders met in Cornwall for the G7 summit. Many of the resources here are helpful for hosting a service outside. You can also see their prayer guide [here](#). There is a helpful section around how to pray a prayer of lament on page three.

## **Guidance for supporting communities pastorally:**

Churches are well equipped to offer pastoral care, already doing so in many other areas of life. Such provision of pastoral care can be adapted to support communities to deal with their emotions around the climate crisis. Churches are a unique place in the community, often seen as a space place, and can create and hold space for people to have these kinds of conversations.

Hannah Malcolm also emphasises that the discipline of lament is not a replacement for other kinds of pastoral care. We need to hold space and offer support, facilitating ongoing conversations about the emotions people are feeling as a result of their understanding and experience of what is happening to the world around them. In episode five of the Fieldnotes Podcast, Stuart Blanch, president of A Rocha Australia, talks about the impact of environmental campaigning and engaging with the climate crisis on his mental health and his experience with receiving counselling around climate grief and his experiences of biodiversity loss, available [here](#).

Holding a grief circle is another way you could be pastorally supporting your church and wider community. Grief circles are a supportive space to connect with grief, share stories, and experience grief collectively. Christian Climate Action have been developing grief circles as a way of helping people to acknowledge the deep emotions felt around the climate crisis. They have some resources available on their website [here](#) with two different versions on holding a grief circle, which you can adapt for your own community. There is also information in their book [Time To Act](#) called "Running Grief Circles" on page 253.

As Hannah emphasises, collective action is a vital part of our pastoral response to climate grief. We lament first, and then we are in a space where we can act.

## **Commit**

### **1) Join one of the faith based greening schemes**

Sign up for one of the national greening schemes and become part of a community of churches and organisations engaging in climate focused teaching and worship, and making their spaces more sustainable. Find the one most relevant to your region here:

- If you're in Scotland, check out [Eco Congregation Scotland](#).

- For churches in England and Wales we encourage you to join the [Eco Church](#) programme.
- If you're from a church in Ireland, try [Eco Congregation Ireland](#).
- For Catholic congregations, we suggest signing up to [Live Simply](#).

## 2) Outlets for healing - spending time in nature

It is important to lament and reflect first before being in a place where you can commit to action. You might like to consider the two steps below.

- **Going to a quiet garden for reflection.** The Quiet Garden Movement nurtures access to outdoor space for prayer, reflection and rest in a variety of settings. You can find more information about the movement, and find a garden local to you, [here](#).
- **Getting involved with practical action** - you could then commit to action through doing some practical conservation and environmental work, for instance getting involved with a wildlife or community allotment project. Watch this video [here](#) by Hazelnut Community Farm, who give a wonderful, unique, and hopeful example of committing to action.

## 3) Get involved with a campaign

There are many organisations making a difference with campaigns and activities you can get involved with. Here are some great examples of hopeful action:

- [Christian Aid: Prayer Chain](#) - join the chain of prayer for climate justice. Prayer is a great way to respond to our feelings of climate grief. *'Each day, grab a cuppa, say our tea-time prayer and post a picture of yourself and your brew at elevenses. Don't forget to use the hashtag #AmenToClimateJustice.'* Sign up on the calendar to fill a time-slot to pray either by yourself or with others from your church.
- [Young Christian Climate Action: Relay to COP26](#) - join the relay to Glasgow, with a variety of different ways to get involved - from joining on the route from Cornwall to Glasgow, providing walkers with accommodation, to offering organisational support, to name just a few. YCCN exists for adults aged 18-30 but they welcome participation from all ages. *'We are organising this Relay to COP26 to show we care about climate justice and creation care. We want to see systematic change on a global and a local scale. We hope that by running this relay, we can raise awareness of COP26 and our imperative as Christians to engage in creation care theology, individually and corporately.'*
- [Crack the Crisis: Wave of Hope](#) - join with others across the UK in calling for a better future through using homemade messages of hope, telling politicians that we want them to work together for a better world. Put up a homemade 'hand' in your window and add photos to the online gallery. You can also find Tearfund's Wave of Hope toolkit [here](#) and more information from Tearfund about the Wave of Hope [here](#).
- [CAFOD](#) (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development) - have a great range of resources for children and young people. As mentioned, young people in particular may be experiencing deep emotions around the climate crisis that could be hard for them to articulate. Engaging with these resources can help open up dialogue for young people to understand and talk about climate change. You can find primary school aged teaching resources [here](#) and secondary school and youth teaching resources [here](#).

## Call

1. We are asking all of the churches who take part in Climate Sunday to sign this common call to the government that the **time is now** to lead the UK towards a healthier, greener and fairer future. This declaration includes a call to:

*'Leave no one behind by increasing support to those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change at home and abroad', calling for a brighter and more hopeful future.*

[Sign The Time is Now declaration](#) as part of your service to demonstrate your support for this and be counted among the thousands of churches who have already signed it as part of Climate Sunday. Use your voice to tell politicians that you want a cleaner, greener, fairer future at the heart of plans to rebuild a strong economy. You can sign The Climate Coalition's 'The Time Is Now' declaration both as a church and an individual.

2. Check out Tearfund's [Climate Emergency Toolkit](#). As the climate crisis accelerates, millions of lives are at risk. Christians around the world are taking urgent action. Step by step, the Climate Emergency Toolkit guides your church or Christian organisation through simple but powerful actions that have an impact far beyond your own walls or community.

## Further resources

With many thanks to the speakers and attendees of the Climate and Pastoral Care webinar hosted by A Rocha UK, who shared many of these resources during the webinar sessions and via the attendees chatbox.

### **Deep Waters by Green Christian:**

[Deep Waters](#) is a programme of eight sessions from Green Christian, offering a safe space to meet a small group of others. With conversation, reflection, and shared experience, Deep Waters invites participants on a journey through climate grief and eco-anxiety, to discover renewed courage, clarity and purpose. The material includes a wide range of videos, articles, poems and images to aid reflection, individually and in a group. You can use the material in your church or network with a suitably skilled facilitator, or participate in a series organised centrally by Green Christian.

Deep Waters is a project of [Borrowed Time](#), Green Christian's programme to develop pastoral care in the climate emergency. Green Christian's [Borrowed Time Facebook page](#) has a comprehensive library of articles from Christian, journalistic and academic sources on the psychological, emotional and theological implications of climate breakdown.

In instances where more in-depth psychological support is necessary, support is available from the [Climate Psychology Alliance](#). The CPA hosts regular [Climate Cafés](#) - simple, hospitable, empathetic spaces where our fears and uncertainties about the climate crisis can be safely expressed. The focus of discussion is on participants' thoughts and feelings about the climate crisis. There are no guest speakers and no talks, and it is an advice-free zone.

CPA also offers [individual therapeutic support](#) for anyone who would like help with the emotional and psychological impact of climate change on their life. CPA maintains a register of members able to offer support, most of them trained and registered psychotherapists and counsellors. They offer safe and

empathetic one-to-one conversations in up to three free sessions. [Further details can be obtained from the CPA website.](#)

### Resources for supporting children and young people:

- Tearfund's research has found that 9 out of 10 Christian teenagers surveyed are concerned about climate change, but just one in 10 believe their church is doing enough to respond to the climate crisis. Read more from their findings [here](#).
- [Shuffle: Green Edition](#) by YouthScape Centre for Research offers 42 challenges over 42 days, inviting young people to engage with the climate crisis, empowering them to make a difference.
- [Opinion | Facing the Climate Emergency: Grieving The Future You Thought You Had](#), an extract from *Facing the Climate Emergency: How to Transform Yourself with Climate Truth* by Margaret Klein Salamon. This is something adults can read to help think about how we can support others, especially young people, to grieve future dreams that may not be possible in light of the climate crisis.

### Books:

- Hannah Malcolm's [Ecology for your Theology Bookshelf](#) has a diverse list of reading recommendations around Christianity and the environment. The bookshelf is ordered into several different topics so that you can locate and read around specific subject matters.
- [Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church](#), edited by Hannah Malcolm, bringing together voices from across the world to think about how we talk about climate grief in the church, and when we have found the words, what we do with that grief.
- [A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety: How to Keep Your Cool on a Warming Planet](#) by Sarah Jaquette Ray, the first "existential toolkit" for combating eco-guilt and burnout while advocating for climate justice.
- [Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World](#) by Katharine Hayhoe, drawing on interdisciplinary research and personal stories, Hayhoe shows that small conversations can have astonishing results. Saving Us leaves us with the tools to open a dialogue with loved ones about how we all can play a role in pushing forward for change.
- [Rage and Hope: 75 Prayers for a Better World](#) edited by Chine McDonald, is a collection of defiant prayers for justice to celebrate 75 years of Christian Aid. Bringing together voices from different contexts and cultures around the world, this is a collection of prayers of lament for the injustices of the world, and prayers of hope for the world we want to see: *'the world is broken, full of injustice and inequality, but despite everything, we hope.'*

### Talks & Webinars:

- [Climate Grief and Pastoral Care: Processing Grief for the Planet](#) hosted by A Rocha UK.
- [Living with Climate-grief and Eco-anxiety with Deborah Tomkins](#) hosted by Green Christian, who are developing resources to help Christians and churches deal with the deep emotional responses to the climate and ecological emergencies.
- [A Rocha Talks - Alone in a World of Wounds: Living with Ecological Grief](#) hosted by A Rocha Canada. This panel explores the lived experience of ecological grief and seeks to foster conversation on how we might engage in this grief in ways that promote sustainability and well-being as humans who care for Creation.

- [Turning Eco-Anxiety into Eco-Action](#) hosted by the National History Museum, exploring why we feel the way we do about the climate crisis, and how to turn ecological grief into determination to make positive change for the future of our planet.

**Blogs, Articles, & Websites:**

- [Climate grief: How we mourn a changing planet](#) various articles from the BBC exploring 'climate emotions'
- [Finding words for the end of the world](#) by Hannah Malcolm
- [Resources to Cope With Climate Anxiety and Grief](#) from The Commons Social Change Library
- [Climate Anxiety Is an Overwhelmingly White Phenomenon](#) from Sarah Jaquette Ray, author of *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety*.