

Christian Aid Talking Climate Justice Tour

Waddington Street URC Durham on 29th October 2022

Tour report

Consolidated summary of initial ideas arising from the conversations:

The 3 actions that gained most 'dots of support' are underlined as the agreed 'first steps' that can be taken to Waddington Street URC Church Meeting for further consideration. Obviously, other actions proposed or implied (including many with no dots) are also very important and should be considered as soon as practicable, some within the context of Eco Church. The order of listing does not imply any hierarchy of importance or urgency (apart from the 'dotted' points). Further possibilities will probably emerge from continuing conversations.

1. When have you been part of or seen hopeful climate action with people in our community/locally?

8 Solar panels on roofs [and other locations ?] and buying renewable energy.

3 Avoiding food waste (a) Food banks [and community pantries] (location & need to travel are important). (b) Many 'cook well' initiatives [including Cook Foundation UK & Food Foundation].

2 People switching to buying and using things that are more recyclable.

1 National support and campaigning around COP26 and COP 27.

1 Durham North Anglican Team has achieved Eco Church Bronze Award.
Waddington Street URC *ditto* and ambition for Silver Award.

[In individual churches and Churches Together we are] sharing responsibility.

Personal commitment: we've turned up today (to learn).

URC Assembly and Northern Synod environmental policies.

Study groups (e.g, recent Churches Together series).

Climate Action Durham (Friends of the Earth): Market Square rallies with students [& petitions].

People writing campaign letters [e.g. about better public transport].

Durham County Council: home improvement agency.

20 mph speed limits.

COP26 Eco Fair - well-attended [All Saints Church November 2021].

People buying food locally.

Refuse Cafe, Chester-le-Street (pay as you feel).

Collecting surplus food from restaurants.

[Individuals and churches] choosing a renewable energy tariff.

People buying electric cars and other vehicles. But . . . [e cars are too expensive for many people. Roughly 14 tonnes CO2 are emitted from manufacturing an electric car (which is more than for a petrol car). The average UK petrol car emits about 1.7 tonnes of CO2 per year, i.e. it would take about 8 years to emit 14 tonnes of CO2. Electric [and H2] vehicles mean purer air in cities but we need to add on emissions from generating/transmitting electricity / H2.]

2. What ideas do you have for how our church can tackle poverty and speak up for climate justice?

11 Political action and campaigning [engaging government [and big corporations?]] at all levels (e.g. for environmental action and the real living wage)

7 Support Christian Aid in our own church [Be aware of URC Commitment for Life*]

5 sermon series (& associated prayer scheme) to educate congregation about climate change.

3 [plus 1 dot from 'Hopeful Action' = 4] Eco church programme and ecological actions.

3 Be informed [e.g.] Invite a speaker about recycling.

3 Responsible consumption and reducing waste.

1 Working in partnership. Learn from each other. Share experience in 'greening'.

1 Avoid 'them and us'. Be constructive in criticism.

1 Make it easy to recycle (but make sure the waste material is properly treated** [e.g. only treated in the UK and not sent abroad]).

1 Bank with ethical banks [E.g. Troidos Bank, Co-op Bank or a mutual building society].

1 Adopt and use modern technology including electric [and hydrogen?] transport (e.g. electric cars [but see earlier notes on electric cars]).

Be involved.

Make use of systemic change.

Ensure [church and home] premises are responsible (e.g. turn down the heating).

Fair trade (and china cups). [e.g. catering in church]

Openness with other groups. Encourage other groups and facilitate their response.

Recognise that the answers are complicated.

- * Commitment for Life (C4L or CfL) is the United Reformed Church's own global justice programme in partnership with Christian Aid and it also supports the campaigning group: Global Justice Now. A CfL congregation focuses on partners in one of: Zimbabwe, Bangladesh or Israel & the occupied Palestinian Territories. CfL resources are provided for all URC churches to assist their mission with prayer, advocacy and effective action for the most vulnerable people in the world.
- ** Coincidentally, there is a report on the treatment of UK waste in this month's 'Which?'

3. How does your faith motivate you to act for climate justice?

2 Love [for other people & other creatures] rather than fear [for ourselves] - love casts out fear.

1 The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

1 Conviction of the importance of our (global) neighbour and future generations (based on the teachings of Jesus).

Reduce climate anxiety – but just do it! [Taking action is a good way of reducing anxiety.]

The Church's teaching about Jesus [based on the Gospels and Epistles].

How we were brought up.

[Trust that] all things are in God's good hands.

Adopted humanity. Remember God's Grace and Forgiveness [But have we truly repented if actions within our control are still harming poor people and other species?]

There will still be a world [but tragically many wondrous creatures will have gone forever!]

God has a special purpose and place for humanity in Creation, working in solidarity with God the Creator. Respect [for Nature]. [Earth is] sacred. We are stewards [or servants?].

At the pinnacle of God's Creation [warts and all ?!]

Questions raised:

- It is difficult for us to identify the 'faith' aspect of our lives?
- Where do non-religious people find their motivation? [natural love for family, grandchildren and friends (which could include acquaintances in poor countries) ?]

NOTES:

I have tried to combine points so as to avoid duplication but without omitting anything and hopefully without introducing my own bias or spin - Bible translators tell us that this is very difficult, so I apologise if anyone feels misrepresented or missed out.

Where possible I've cross-checked points made (by reference to the appropriate web-sites) and (unsurprisingly) have not found any problems.

However, some of the statements as recorded were very succinct and so I've occasionally added (in square brackets []) what seems to me to be implied. For example: in the context of 'cook well' initiatives, 'Foundation' is mentioned - I looked this up and found 'Cook Foundation UK' and 'Food Foundation'.

[If you want this report 'pure and simple', simply ignore anything in square brackets & substitute your own thoughts!] - CJJ

QUESTIONING THE QUESTIONS:

These are leading questions, but the groups coped well. The first is about past 'climate action' (a good 'open' term) although there is rightly an implied: 'and what more should we be doing?'

However, this predisposes us to look for climate actions when responding to the following two questions. That is right because mitigating global warming (along with tackling biodiversity loss) is the most effective way to reduce future poverty. Further, when 'speaking up for climate justice', actions and example may indeed speak louder than words. Interestingly, and again rightly, we regarded poverty as a serious issue in the UK as well as in the global South.

Maybe the 3rd question is most challenging. We may have reached the 'end of the beginning' in terms of government and general public awareness of a climate emergency and so maybe there is now less of an imperative for us to sound the alarm. (That is exemplified when public and political pressure force the Prime Minister to reverse his decision not to attend COP 27!) (although even churches seem in denial about the drastic changes we all must make).

There'll be no 'cheap grace' if climate chaos bites, food imports dry up and a trickle of climate refugees becomes an 'invasion'. Yet God's call to the Church Universal is to maintain Hope, Faith and Love in the world during the most difficult of situations; God will give us the strength.

However, 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof' and the clear implication of question 3 is: 'motivation to today's action?' Perhaps the 4th response: 'but just do it' hits the nail on the head! In the teeth of worry and even fear, we go out singing: 'You shall go forth with joy'.

COMMENTS

Everyone will have their own reflections following this event, so hopefully we can continue our conversations alongside developing effective actions as individuals, churches and groups of churches. For what it is worth, here are 3 thoughts from an old hand (like most of us!). [CJJ]

1. If we agree that the two planks to climate justice are:

- polluters must pay (a lot) to make good increasing loss & damage to poor communities,
- we all must make very rapid reductions in emissions to stop things getting much worse,

then I'm puzzled that, among many highly relevant responses, the following were not named:

- the elimination or serious reduction of our consumption of meat, dairy & fish,
- long-debated actions like refusing to fly (with some caveats) & eliminating plastic waste,
- robust engagement with corporate power (see Global Justice Now:

<https://act.globaljustice.org.uk/case-climate-justice-illustrated-booklet>),

- Christian Aid's 'Letter for Creation' campaigning through the Arts,
- supporting the three demands of Extinction Rebellion*,
- even the possibility of engaging in civil disobedience with Christian Climate Action.

Then I realised that they can all be read into important but 'less threatening' broad terms like:

- 'responsible consumption'
- 'recognise that the answers are complicated'
- 'political action'

Christians are very good at not giving offence, but do we need now to 'call a spade a spade' ?

2. We re-affirmed the key principle that those who have benefited most from fossil fuels (not to mention cutting down forests, draining wet-lands, eating lots of meat etc) must somehow provide the trillions of pounds required to help poor countries (who have not benefited to anything like the same extent) to adapt to climate change and deal with their loss and damage.

Understandably, governments of rich countries aren't happy with the idea. Churches don't have this sort of money but our members and (some of) our buildings have benefited from activities that emit carbon and use up resources. Churches took a lead raising the alarm, so surely we must take a lead in sharing our wealth (such as it is) with poorer and more threatened people?

3. I suggest that we need an equivalent event focused on the issues around biodiversity loss, which (in my view anyway) constitute as great a danger to both poor and richer countries as does climate chaos. Care of Creation (i.e. in addition to mitigation of and adaption to climate change) is a large part of Eco church and I'll investigate whether A Rocha could help with this.

* I'm impressed by XR's deep-felt concern for people and planet and their willingness to learn and adapt. ('Just Stop Oil' is another matter.) XR's demands for emissions cuts, even if unrealistic, are in line with what is needed. XR are our natural allies (*cf* the sheep & the goats). If we are hesitant to join XR, our challenge is: can we do better legally (with including disadvantaged UK communities and without upsetting the public) to get the message across?

CONTEXT

This DIY Christian Aid Talking Climate Justice Tour was based on resources provided by Christian Aid in their hope that the initiative would be taken up by many UK churches. The concept is that all great movements start with serious conversations, leading to action. We are one of the first churches to 'join the Tour' in our region, so we invited our sisters & brothers in Christ in local Christian Aid and nearby URC churches to join us for a journey of exploration. We are grateful to many concerned, thoughtful and enthusiastic people who turned up to talk, listen and plan. Also for the unstinted support of our Minister, Revd Marcus Hargis, and of the Northern Synod Green Apostle, Revd Dr Trevor Jamison. Not least, we say thank you to the unsung heroes who provided equipment, set up the rooms, served refreshments & cleared up.

A key idea behind the 'Tour' is to empathise with those who are suffering and will suffer most from poverty and the environmental crises. We strongly commend everyone to read (or re-read) the Christian Aid booklet: 'Our Prophetic Journey Towards Climate Justice':

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/our-prophetic-journey-towards-climate-justice>

We started with a quick over-view of the worrying current scene. Political words and actions do not tally. None of the 40 indicators for the world to halve CO2 emissions within 8 years is on track. The true UK cuts since 1990 (taking into account net imports, planes & ships) are only about 11% (November 2021) <https://www.carbonindependent.org/> (then click on: The UK's share of the global carbon budget runs out in two years, then scroll down). Instead of engaging with concerned citizens, the Government wants harsh new penalties for disruptive climate protesters and Sir Keir Starmer agrees: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/oct/24/keir-starmer-backs-stiff-sentences-for-climate-protesters-who-block-roads>

After prayer for the care of Creation, we asked one another: 'When was the last time you had a conversation with someone about the climate crisis - and did you then do something more?' Yes, we need to talk more.

It is alarming that the world is warming up faster, leading to more frequent and more extreme climate events, rising sea levels and the loss of the glaciers that supply many people with fresh water. Worse, people in poverty are the most vulnerable and lack the means to cope. Therefore the climate crisis [and the biodiversity crisis] is worsening the poverty crisis [and, lamentably, the crises for other species]. The great injustice is that those least responsible suffer most and are least well equipped to cope.

As an example, we looked at the situation in Zimbabwe, where people in poverty are heavily reliant on rain-fed agriculture. But temperature rises have resulted in unpredictable rainfall and longer-lasting droughts. Worst affected and suffering most, of course, are those black women who are living in poverty. The lucky ones get support in adapting from C.A. partner, BRAC.

We cannot avoid politics when we ask about the root causes of the environmental crises and chronic poverty. British colonialism and industrialisation were built on the wealth generated by the enslavement of Africans [plus those dark satanic mills and the conditions down the pits]. It would be bad enough if this were just history but the dysfunctional way the world works today echoes the imbalances and injustices of the past. The global North has prospered while much of the global South has been pushed into poverty. The 'rules' are exacerbating global warming and pushing more people into grinding poverty. But human rules can be changed!

Jesus stood up for the poor. (Luke 4: 18-19 refers to the principle of the Jubilee year, when debts are forgiven, land is restored to the original families and slaves are freed.) In the Bible and in the history of the Church, God often chooses the least likely and the least qualified – so we can accept that God has chosen us and will go with us.

We moved to our conversations in two groups – see above for the outcomes. After a cup of Fairtrade tea or coffee and biscuits, Marcus helped us, by means of 'dots' to select three actions to work on first. These will be taken to a Church Meeting for urgent consideration.

Trevor closed with a commissioning prayer and we left singing: 'You shall go out with joy.'

The event was planned and run by members of Waddington Street URC Eco church group and Christian Aid group: Revd John Durell, Fred Robinson, Helen Cockburn and Charles Jolly.

ON-LINE REFERENCES

Our Prophetic Journey Towards Climate Justice:

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/our-prophetic-journey-towards-climate-justice>

Loss and Damage Campaign:

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved-campaigns/climate-change/loss-and-damage-faqs>

Nushrat's Story:

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved-campaigns/climate-change/rise-up-pay-up-stories>

Letters For Creation:

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/letters-creation>

Campaigning with Your Local Politician:

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-05/Campaigning-with-your-local-politician-guide-campaigns-may2019.pdf>

Parliamentary Briefing Paper:

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-09/ld-and-adaptation-mp-briefing-july-2022.pdf>

Tipping points if global warming reaches 1.5 degC:

[Global warming above 1.5C could trigger 'multiple' tipping points - Carbon Brief](#)

Pakistan floods:

<https://350.org/my-country-pakistan-is-drowning/>

Climate anxiety:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/is-climate-change-keeping-you-up-at-night-you-may-have-climate-anxiety-202206132761>

Population is not the problem: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2021/05/25/slowing-population-growth-environment/>

The rich get richer and the poor get poorer:

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/inequality-and-poverty-hidden-costs-tax-dodging>

(Political comment):

<https://bylinetimes.com/2022/08/26/the-rich-are-getting-richer-and-they-spend-their-money-on-power/>

You Shall Go Out With Joy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivfUKd6AFXw>

'The trees of the field shall clap their hands' (From the end of Deutero-Isaiah) refers to all the nations of the world rejoicing and joining in the singing when the chosen people of God are freed and restored. As Christians, we identify this with the rejoicing when Jesus brings in God's Kingdom of justice, love, peace and forgiveness. This is not just some far off event; by the Grace of God, the Kingdom comes when we seek, with God's help, to live by Kingdom values.