

## INTRODUCTION

What do the churches say about our relationship with the environment? According to Catholic Social Teaching, all of us have a responsibility to contribute to the well being of society and this includes living in harmony with the natural world. The following is an extract from a document produced by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in 1996, called *The Common Good*:

“The Church recognises that care for the environment is part of care for the common good – the environment is one of the ‘common goods’ which are the shared responsibility of the human race. We have to reject some of the easy assumptions of an earlier stage of industrialisation, such as that the human race, because God had given it dominion over the world, had an unlimited freedom to despoil the natural environment for its own purposes. Those who feel moved to a loving care for the internal balances of nature are responding to a deep religious instinct implanted within them by God. Their intuition tells them that the human race takes its place on this planet as a gift and privilege, and needs to cultivate what the new Catechism of the Catholic Church calls a ‘religious respect for the integrity of creation’ (para 2415)”.

*The Common Good, 1996, paragraph 106*

## Experience

Group members say who they are and why they are at the meeting. Then, consider:

- *What is your earliest memory of feeling a sense of wonder about the natural world?*
- *Do you have any favourite poems, songs or hymns that focus on the environment?*
- *How do you show appreciation for the natural world today?*
- *What stories have you heard on the media lately that are linked to climate change?*

- *From your own experience, what have you noticed about Britain's changing climate?*

## Analysis

**Look at Appendix 1: What is global warming and why does it matter?**

- *What factors cause climate change? Which of them are linked to lifestyle?*
- *How far should the environment be included as an aspect of the common good?*

**Look at Appendix 2: Dispelling the myths**

- *Which of these points strikes you most forcibly? What is your response to the cartoon?*

**Look at Appendix 3: Churches tackle climate change**

- *Why is the Operation Noah campaign important?*
- *What distinctive contribution can faith groups make towards tackling climate change?*

## Theological Reflection

**Look at Reflection and Action Sheet 1.**

- *Spend 30 minutes reading and reflecting, using the questions given as a guide.*

## Action

Members of the group undertake to read and list the main points in Reading Sheets 1, 2, 3 and 4 in preparation for the next meeting.

Look out for stories in the media about climate change. Collect clippings which highlight the impact on countries of the South and on vulnerable communities. Bring them along next time.

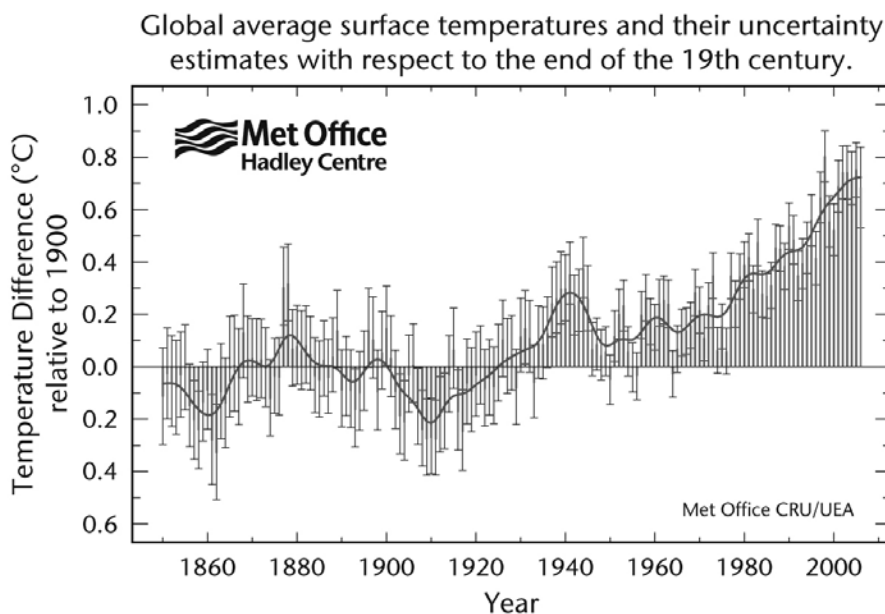
**Look at the ideas and resources listed on Reflection and Action Sheet 1.**

## Appendix 1: What is global warming and why does it matter?

Earth's climate has been relatively stable for the last 10,000 years, but something very serious has become evident over recent decades. Scientists report that Earth's temperature is rising dangerously fast, and this rise is due to human activity. It is affecting our weather systems, freshwater and marine ecosystems, animals and plants, and human society.

Climate change or global warming is caused by the rapidly increasing levels of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other polluting gases in our atmosphere. The gases absorb heat and form a blanket around the Earth. Once released the greenhouse gases stay in the atmosphere for many years. As they build up, the planet's temperature rises. Greenhouse gases are released by burning fossil fuels - coal, oil and gas - and by cutting down forests.

The vast majority of the world's electricity is created by burning fossil fuels and much of the world's transport is powered by oil. This means that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have



escalated, and its heat-trapping properties mean that the global temperature rises. This doesn't mean that every day will be hotter than the last; it means that globally, over a period of years, average temperatures are increasing.

### 2 degrees threshold

Many of the world's scientists now agree that to avoid the worst impacts of climate change we need to make sure that average temperature rise stays below 2°C above the pre-industrial average temperature. The world has already warmed by 0.7°C since pre-industrial times. The 2°C threshold is based on the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and this threshold has been accepted by many governments, including the UK government and the European Union.

### A temperature rise of more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels will mean:

- water shortages for up to 4 billion people
- food shortages for 250 million people
- 40-60 million more Africans exposed to malaria

Source: Stern Review on the economics of climate change, 2006

Someone in the UK puts the same amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in 22 weeks that someone in Tanzania does in their whole lifetime.

Source: New Economics Foundation



## Appendix 2: Dispelling the myths

**Q** What are climate change and global warming, and how are they related?

**A.** Global warming refers to an increase in average global temperatures, which in turn causes climate change. It is measured by temperature readings around the world, and scientific studies of tree rings, corals, and ice cores.

**Q** Aren't the scientists split on this issue?

**A.** The vast majority of scientists who study these issues around the world - including those with the World Meteorological Organisation, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the U.S. National Academy of Sciences - agree that global warming is happening and that humans are the main force behind it.

**Q** Hasn't Earth's climate always changed with ice ages and interglacial periods?

**A.** Complex natural fluctuations still affect the Earth's surface temperature and climate over long timescales. However, simulations using sophisticated computer-based climate models confirm that recent global warming has been mainly caused by human activities.

**Q** Which countries contribute the most to global warming?

**A.** Wealthier industrial countries contribute the most since they use most of the world's fossil fuels. Europe, Japan, and North America - with roughly 15 percent of the world's current population - account for two-thirds of the carbon dioxide now in the atmosphere. With less than five percent of world population, the U.S. emits 24 percent of the world's total. But the spotlight is shifting to China and India, where emissions are growing fast with large populations and growing economies. It must be noted though that the lifestyle of the average Indian emits one-twentieth of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of the average North American.



**Q** Won't global warming benefit some regions?

**A.** In some northern parts, such as Siberia, the growing season will lengthen and crop yields rise. However, as Arctic permafrost melts, subsidence will occur and decomposition will release massive amounts of methane - a greenhouse gas. Most scientists believe that short-term local benefits of climate change will be far outweighed by costs.

**Q** Why are development agencies concerned about this environmental issue?

**A.** Developing countries will be hit hardest because they have fewer resources with which to address and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Poor people, particularly farmers, are very dependent upon predictable weather patterns. Africans have a tiny carbon footprint though they may suffer most from climate change.



### Appendix 3: Churches tackle climate change



More than 500 people walked through the streets of Coventry in a 'rainbow pilgrimage' at the official launch of Operation Noah in October 2004. The launch was supported by Britain's biggest Christian churches, and culminated in a service in Coventry Cathedral.

In November 2007, the British government committed the UK to reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 60 percent before 2050 to help tackle global warming. The Climate Change Bill has made the UK the first country to put carbon emissions reduction targets into law. An independent committee on climate change is to advise on 'five-year carbon budgets' as part of the new commitment to carbon reduction.

However, Operation Noah is urging the government to go further – to achieve at least a 90 percent cut by 2030.



Speakers in Coventry included - left to right - Bishop John Oliver (retired Anglican Bishop of Hereford), Paul Bodenham (a founder of Operation Noah) and Sir John Houghton (meteorologist and former member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). Sir John Houghton urged the British government to do more than "make grand speeches" on the issue.



Westminster Catholic Archdiocese Justice and Peace Commission, including its Chair, Fr Joe Ryan (far left) and its Fieldworker, Barbara Kentish (second from left), attended the annual national climate rally in London during October 2006.

## Reflection and Action Sheet 1

### Reflection

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today: I set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live in the love of Yahweh, your God.

*Deuteronomy 30:19*

The earth is mourning, withering,  
the world is pining, withering,  
the heavens are pining away with the earth.

The earth is defiled  
under its inhabitants' feet,  
for they have transgressed the law,  
violated the precept,  
broken the everlasting covenant.

*Isaiah 24:4-5*

### Song of the Builders

On a summer morning  
I sat down  
on a hillside  
to think about God –

a worthy pastime.  
Near me, I saw  
a single cricket;  
it was moving the grains of the hillside

this way and that way.  
How great was its energy,  
How humble its effort.  
Let us hope

it will always be like this,  
each of us going on  
in our inexplicable ways  
building the universe.

*Mary Oliver*

When you tell the people all these words, and they ask you,

“Why has Yahweh decreed this appalling disaster for us?

What is our crime?

What sin have we committed against Yahweh our God?”

Then you are to answer, “It is because your ancestors abandoned me – it is Yahweh who speaks – and followed alien gods and served and worshiped them. They abandoned me and did not keep my Law. And you for your part have behaved even worse than your ancestors. Look, each of you follows the dictates of his hardened, wicked heart and will not listen to me.”

*Jeremiah 16:10-12*

### Questions:

- What might “broken the everlasting covenant” mean in the Isaiah reading? Could it be a reference to the God’s covenant with Noah, after the flood, which extended to “everything that lives on the earth” (Genesis 9:8-11)?
- How far does your faith guide your relationship to the natural world?
- What might “followed alien gods” and “did not keep my Law” in the Jeremiah text mean for us today?
- What do these passages say to you in the light of both the threat of climate change and the concept of the common good?



## Action

Look at the Operation Noah website - [www.operationnoah.org](http://www.operationnoah.org) - and consider the actions suggested there. The following videos can be viewed on the website: *Operation Noah – Creating a Climate of Justice, Climate Change Service and March 8th December 2007 and God is Green.*

Do the BBC's Climate Change quiz and test your knowledge of Climate Change. See [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in\\_depth/sci\\_tech/2000/climate\\_change/quiz/default1.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/in_depth/sci_tech/2000/climate_change/quiz/default1.stm)

*Other eco-quizzes available on:*  
[www.ecokids.ca/pub/eco\\_info/topics/climate/quiz/index.cfm](http://www.ecokids.ca/pub/eco_info/topics/climate/quiz/index.cfm)

Find out more about Britain's changing climate and British government action. See [www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/antenna/climatechange/Cip2/121.asp](http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/antenna/climatechange/Cip2/121.asp) and [www.defra.gov.uk/ENVIRONMENT/climatechange/uk/ukccp/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/ENVIRONMENT/climatechange/uk/ukccp/index.htm)

The website of Christian Ecology Link – which was set up 25 years ago by Christians concerned with the environment – contains fact sheets, worship ideas and an events diary. It is a useful resource to look at regularly and will keep your group in touch with national initiatives on climate change. See [www.christian-ecology.org.uk](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk)

## Downloads:

*The Call of Creation* document was produced by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales in 2002. [http://www.progressio.org.uk/Shared\\_ASP\\_Files/UploadedFiles/7F840020-CBD1-4EE9-8423-6FD1643D3B5D\\_THECALLOFCREATION.doc](http://www.progressio.org.uk/Shared_ASP_Files/UploadedFiles/7F840020-CBD1-4EE9-8423-6FD1643D3B5D_THECALLOFCREATION.doc)

Christian Aid's Report, *Truly Inconvenient: Tackling poverty and climate change at once.*

<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/climatechange/Truly%20Inconvenient.pdf>

## Lifestyle tips:

Repair, re-use, recycle:

- Support local charity shops and use your own shopping bags.
- When buying wood products, check the wood is from a legal and sustainable source.
- The *livesimply* network of Catholic agencies calls us to look hard at our lifestyles, and to choose to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor. See [www.livesimply.org.uk](http://www.livesimply.org.uk).
- See [www.frn.org.uk](http://www.frn.org.uk) (Furniture Reuse Network) and [www.greenchoices.org](http://www.greenchoices.org) (UK Guide to Greener Living).

Walk, cycle, take the bus, tram or train whenever you can.

- Organise a lift share scheme for your church - for both car owners and those without.
- If you must drive, driving between 50 mph and 60 mph is the most fuel efficient. See [www.dft.gov.uk/ActOnCO2/](http://www.dft.gov.uk/ActOnCO2/) for information about how to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from cars.

Try to reduce the amount of rubbish you put out for collection and disposal. Avoid goods with heavy packaging.

## Reading Sheet 1: Operation Noah



Operation Noah exists because God's creation faces the most urgent peril. For this peril to be averted requires a rapid and radical transformation of our economy and culture towards liveable, supportable lifestyles that will increase happiness and well-being, while safeguarding the whole of God's creation for future generations.

The name 'Operation Noah' was chosen for the following reasons:

- *Floods are the environmental consequence of global warming as ice-caps melt, sea levels rise and strengthening storms create localised flooding.*
- *The Noah story tells how God loses patience with human irresponsibility. Humans defile creation with their violence, and innocent animals are caught up in the punishment inflicted on guilty humans.*
- *But there is a second chance, for the humans and for the animals. This second chance is reinforced by a covenant or commitment. The humans are committed to new responsibility and God is committed to maintaining the reliability of Earth's life systems.*

Operation Noah was the first Christian campaign to focus exclusively on Climate Change and was founded in 2001 by Christian Ecology Link (CEL). It later became a joint project of CEL and the Environmental Issues Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. In 2007, a dedicated campaign director, Ann Pettifor, was appointed to take the campaign forward. In late 2007, Mark Dowd, the

Catholic producer of Channel 4's *God is Green* was appointed as campaign strategist.

### Guiding principles

Climate change is as much a spiritual as an environmental crisis. Western societies are gripped by the values of greed and conspicuous consumption; by the god of money and by the alienation and loneliness of being defined first and foremost as consumers. We are seldom defined as individuals in community – with each other and with the Earth. Operation Noah exists to remind us of those connections, and of our responsibility to protect Creation. Above all, Operation Noah exists to remind us that by living in community, by exercising responsibility, by living simply and sustainably, we improve both our own well-being and happiness while sustaining our communities and the Earth.

### Starting point for the campaign

Christians have a unique leadership role to play in helping society and government face up to this crisis. Churches are a focal point for people and communities, while church leaders occupy positions of influence in centres of political authority, such as the House of Lords. Just as Christians and people of other faiths were central to the mass mobilisation of Jubilee 2000's *Drop the Debt* campaign, so climate change is a call to Christians to exercise leadership in their communities.

### Goal

The core goal is for the British government to lead society and the world by urgently enacting a framework of legislation that will fairly and equitably drive down average carbon dioxide emissions in Britain to one tonne per person by 2030.



## Reading Sheet 2: The science of climate change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is an international panel of scientists and researchers that provides advice on climate change to the international community. Established by the World Meteorological Organisation and the United Nations Environment Program in 1988, it is acknowledged by governments around the world, as the authoritative source of advice on climate change science. The role of the IPCC is to assess the scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant for the understanding of the risks of human-induced climate change.

The IPCC has completed four comprehensive assessment reports to date, in 1990, 1996, 2001 and 2007. The Fourth Assessment Report in 2007 said:

- *Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level.*
- *Eleven of the last twelve years (1995-2006) rank among the twelve warmest years in the instrumental record of global surface temperature (since 1850). The temperature increase is widespread over the globe, and is greater at higher northern latitudes. Land regions have warmed faster than the oceans.*
- *Observed decreases in snow and ice extent are also consistent with warming. Satellite data since 1978 shows that annual average Arctic sea ice extent has shrunk by 2.7 percent per decade. Mountain glaciers and snow cover have declined in both hemispheres.*
- *From 1900 to 2005, rainfall increased significantly in eastern parts of North and South America, northern Europe and northern and central Asia but declined in the Sahel, the Mediterranean, southern Africa and parts of southern Asia. Globally, the area affected by drought has increased since the 1970s.*

### Causes of climate change

Global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide have increased markedly as a result of human activities since 1750. Global increases in carbon dioxide concentrations are due primarily to fossil fuel use, with land-use change providing another significant but smaller contribution. Deforestation is a significant contributor.

### Distribution of impacts and vulnerabilities

There are sharp differences across regions and those in the weakest economic position, particularly in the poorest countries, are often the most vulnerable to climate change. There is increasing evidence of greater vulnerability of specific groups such as the poor and elderly in rich and poor countries. Moreover, there is increased evidence that low-latitude and less-developed areas generally face greater risk, for example in dry areas and mega-deltas.

*In 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and former U.S. Vice-President Al Gore Jr. were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize "for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change" See [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch)*



*Fields of Half Moons in Niger help to retain rainwater in increasing drought conditions.*

*Peter Witth/Caritas Denmark*



## ***Reading Sheet 3: Extracts from the 2001 Statement of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on climate change and Catholic Social Teaching.***

### **The universal common good**

Global climate is by its very nature a part of the planetary commons. The Earth's atmosphere encompasses all people, creatures, and habitats. The melting of ice sheets and glaciers, the destruction of rainforests, and the pollution of water in one place can have environmental impacts elsewhere. As Pope John Paul II has said: "*We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well being of future generations*". Responses to global climate change should reflect our interdependence and common responsibility for the future of our planet. Individual nations must measure their own self-interest against the greater common good and contribute equitably to global solutions.

### **Protecting the environment for future generations**

The common good calls us to extend our concern to future generations. Passing along the problem of global climate change to future generations as a result of our delay, indecision, or self-interest would be easy. But we simply cannot leave this problem for the children of tomorrow.

### **Population and authentic development**

Historically, the industrialised countries have emitted more greenhouse gases that warm the climate than have the developing countries. Affluent nations such as our own have to acknowledge the impact of voracious consumerism instead of simply calling for population and emissions controls from people in poorer nations. Development policies that seek to reduce poverty with an emphasis on improved education and social conditions for women are far more effective than population reduction programs and far more respectful of women's dignity.

### **Caring for the poor**

In a special way, the common good requires solidarity with the poor who are often without the resources to face many problems, including the potential impacts of climate change. Each of us should carefully consider our choices and lifestyles. We live in a culture that prizes the consumption of material goods. While the poor often have too little, many of us can be easily caught up in a frenzy of wanting more and more - a bigger home, a larger car, etc. Even though energy resources literally fuel our economy and provide a good quality of life, we need to ask about ways we can conserve energy, prevent pollution, and live more simply.

As people of religious faith, we bishops believe that the atmosphere that supports life on Earth is a God-given gift, and one we must respect and protect. It unites us as one human family. If we harm the atmosphere, we dishonour our Creator and the gift of creation. The values of our faith call us to humility, sacrifice, and a respect for life and the natural gifts God has provided.

*Full text at:*

[www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml#change](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml#change).

*See also [www.catholicsandclimatechange.org](http://www.catholicsandclimatechange.org)*

### **The Gift of Creation in the Eucharist**

Christians are reminded of the precious gifts of creation at each Eucharistic celebration. In the ancient prayer over the gifts of bread and wine we praise God our Creator, and remember that these material goods are given to us by God and are fashioned through the co-operation of Creator and creature. So our own daily living is to reflect our gratitude for the gifts that have been given to us.

*The Call of Creation, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 2002.*

## Reading Sheet 4: The Otin Taii Declaration

*Extracts from a statement of the Pacific Churches' Consultation on Climate Change, held during March 2004 in Kiribati. 'Otin Taii' means sunrise, a symbol of hope in the Kiribati language.*

### Overview

Here on the small island atoll of Kiribati, the impacts of human-induced climate change are already visible. The sea level is rising. People's homes are vulnerable to the increasingly high tides and storm surges. Shores are eroding and the coral reefs are becoming bleached. The water supplies and soil fertility are being threatened by the intrusion of salt water. Weather patterns are less predictable, posing risks to fisher-folk and farmers. Kiribati is not alone in its plight. Many other island nations in the Pacific are experiencing similar impacts of human-induced climate change. Our peoples, who number about seven million, are already suffering and are vulnerable to more impacts in the future.

We, participants in the Pacific Churches' Consultation on Climate Change, feel called by God to:

- *Affirm our commitment to care for the earth as our response to God's love for creation;*
- *Declare as forcefully as we can the urgency of the threat of human-induced climate change to the lives, livelihoods, societies, cultures and eco-systems of the Pacific Islands;*
- *Dedicate ourselves to engaging our churches in education and action on climate change;*
- *Call on our sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the world to act in solidarity with us to reduce the causes of human-induced climate change. We issue this call particularly to churches in the highly-industrialised nations whose societies are historically responsible for the majority of polluting emissions.*

- *We further urge these countries to take responsibility for the ecological damage that they have caused by paying for the costs of adaptation to the impacts that can be anticipated;*
- *Invite church-related specialised ministries for emergency-response, development and advocacy to integrate climate change and adaptation projects into their policy-development, education and advocacy;*
- *Express appreciation to the World Council of Churches for its support of the Pacific churches on the issue of climate change;*
- *Encourage companies that are major producers or consumers of fossil fuels to support a transition toward less carbon-intensive economies, reduced energy usage and the development of cleaner, renewable energy sources.*

### What we believe

Throughout the Bible, from the Genesis creation story onward, we learn about God's love for the earth and all its creatures including humanity. The Biblical understanding of the wholeness and inter-relatedness of all creation has some similarities to the traditional Pacific teachings about the land known as *Vanua/Fonua/Whenua/Enua* and the ocean referred to as *Moana*. The implications of this vision include the need for us humans to live with respect and humility within God's creation. Responding to God's love for creation, we are called to care for the earth and limit destructive activities such as those that contribute to climate change.

*The Consultation involved people from 15 Pacific Island countries. Full statement at <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/climate-change-water/11-03-04-otin-taii-declaration.html>*