

# Sustainable Development

## INTRODUCTION

It is said that British people often start a conversation with strangers and friends by talking about the weather. If the weather is sunny, we might say something along the lines of “lovely day today”. But how often do we truly show gratitude to God for the gift of a stable climate and the wonders of the natural world? For those of us who are gardeners, would we agree with eco-theologian Thomas Berry that we are “participating in one of the deepest mysteries of the universe”?

The psalmist certainly spoke from the heart with the words, “Yahweh, what variety you have created, arranging everything so wisely!” Elsewhere in Psalm 104 we hear that God “keeps renewing the world”. Profound gratitude will bring with it an attitude of respect towards the natural world and also hope in the future, appreciating the regenerative powers of God’s creation. Christian churches, organisations and individuals are joining international efforts to halt ecological damage, to stop edging nations into further poverty and other species to extinction, and to work towards a more sustainable future. This is a tremendous witness to God’s love for the world.

### Experience

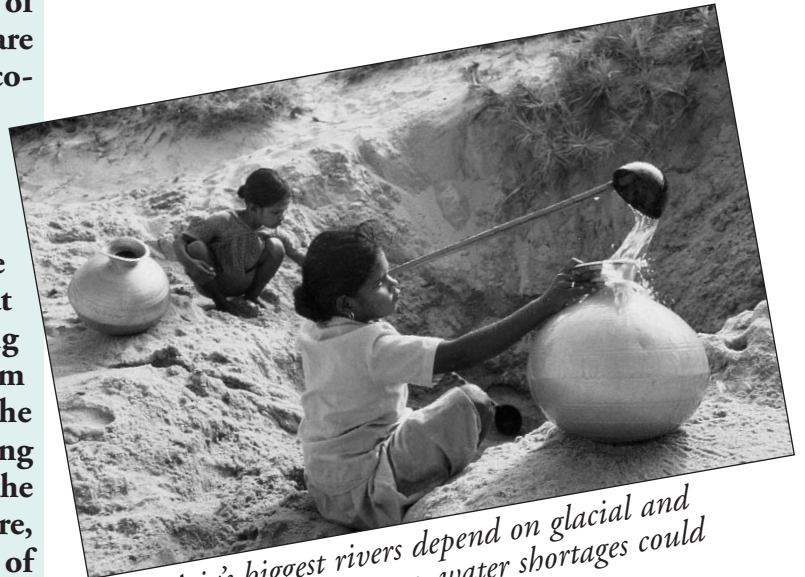
Feedback on action since the last meeting.

- *Where do you find hope that the climate crisis can be addressed effectively?*
- *What campaigning actions have caught your attention on the Operation Noah website?*

In the coming decades, the worst impacts of global warming will be felt most in more than 40 Small Island Developing States in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans; in the UN-recognised group of 50 Least Developed Countries, mainly in Africa but also in Asia; and in a number of other highly vulnerable African nations. These

100 countries have a combined population of nearly one billion people, but produce only 3.2 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

- *What can the Christian churches do to address this situation?*



*Since Asia’s biggest rivers depend on glacial and snow melt at their sources, water shortages could become an increasingly severe problem.*



*Deforestation continues unabated in countries such as Brazil, Nigeria and Indonesia, releasing more carbon and exacerbating loss of soil and biodiversity.*



The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that by the middle of the century, more than 200 million people could be forced from their native lands by rising sea levels, floods and droughts.

- *How do you think we should respond in Britain to refugees from overseas, displaced from their homes by climate change?*
- *What measures are starting to be put in place in Britain - such as new building regulations and emergency flood procedures - to address national impacts of global warming?*

**Look at Appendix 16: Signs of Hope**

- *Which signs are you most pleased to see?*

### Analysis

**Look at Appendix 17: Energy for the Future**

**Feedback on Reading Sheet 14.**

If possible, feed in the Greenpeace energy video, mentioned on Action Sheet 5.

- *How feasible is it to move towards renewable energy?*
- *In what ways could life improve in quality in a low carbon society?*
- *What areas should be the focus for reducing our energy consumption?*

- *How surprised would you be to hear that oil companies have been amongst the biggest funders of climate skeptics?*

**Look at Appendix 18: Principles to meet the climate change threat**

Examine the questions given.

**Feedback on Reading Sheets 15, 16 and 17.**

**Look at Appendix 19: Can we turn it around?**

- *Which quotes strike you most and why?*

### Theological Reflection

**Look at Reflection and Action Sheet 6.**

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

### Action

**Look at the ideas and resources listed on Reflection and Action Sheet 6.**



*Volunteers clear rubbish from a public park.*



# Sustainable Development

## Appendix 16: Signs of hope

### Environmental destruction is sinful

After 1,500 years the Vatican has brought the seven deadly sins up to date by adding seven new ones for the age of globalisation. Since March 2008 the list now includes polluting and causing social injustice. A Vatican spokesman commented that, "you offend God not only by stealing, blaspheming or coveting your neighbour's wife, but also by ruining the environment".

### Church buildings seek energy efficiency

Westminster Cathedral is now largely lit by energy-efficient lamps.

### Ecumenical and inter-faith collaboration

Mark Dowd (left), Operation Noah's Campaign Strategist, collaborated with Yaseer Ahmed (right), of the Bolton Council of Mosques on an inter-faith climate change event there in April 2008.



### Learning to live simply

On 14th March 2008, 350 Catholic sixth formers attended a *livesimply* network event in Manchester. *livesimply* is a network of 60 Catholic organisations and ecumenical partners - which calls upon people in the UK to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with those living in poverty.



### Getting in touch with the land

Sr Pat Robb, a sister of the Congregation of Jesus for more than 40 years, tends her organic allotment in Cambridgeshire, together with her involvement with the East Anglia Catholic Diocese Justice and Peace Commission.

### Lobbying on the Climate Bill

On 23rd April 2008, more than 300 members of around 40 religious orders attended a lobby of parliament to urge MPs to strengthen the Climate Change Bill. They wanted a bigger increase in the carbon dioxide reduction target and urged that aviation be included in the UK's tally of emissions.



## Appendix 17: Energy for the future

The UK's biggest source of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is burning fossil fuels - coal, gas and oil - in power stations. Old coal fired power stations produce more dangerous CO<sub>2</sub> than gas ones. In December 2007, a leading climate scientist and director of Nasa's Goddard Institute, James Hansen, wrote to Prime Minister Gordon Brown, urging him not to allow Britain's first new coal plant in 30 years to be built at Kingsnorth in Kent.



### Alternatives to fossil fuels:

#### Renewable energy

Renewables currently provide only about four percent of the UK's energy. Examples of renewable energy sources include:

- **Solar** - converting the Sun's energy into electricity and heat.
- **Wind** - electricity from wind energy. The UK has, in the form of wind power, the largest renewable energy resource in Europe.
- **Hydroelectric** - energy in flowing water is harnessed.

*Home Truths - A report from Friends of the Earth and the Cooperative Bank suggests that every British home needs to generate renewable energy in order to help cut the UK's carbon emissions significantly. Yet, small scale renewables like solar panels on roofs, wind turbines in gardens and community-*

*owned renewable energy schemes currently receive little or no government support.*

#### Nuclear power

Nuclear power currently provides around 20 percent of the UK's electricity, and the government seems keen to expand this percentage. Some argue that nuclear power is a low-carbon solution to climate change, but Christian environmental groups argue it is dangerous and expensive because of:

- **Security threats** - power stations could be terrorist targets.
- **Toxic waste** - pollutes the environment and nuclear waste needs careful management for generations.
- **Global proliferation** - availability of deadly materials is increased.

#### What about.....more energy efficiency

Cutting down on energy use will help stop climate change and is very cost effective.

#### Biofuels not the answer

Biofuels are seen by some as a way to combat climate change and provide an alternative source of fuel in the face of decreasing global oil reserves. But according to the Working Group on Climate Change and Development, which includes Operation Noah, CAFOD and Columban Faith and Justice, biofuels place greater pressure on agricultural land and result in the encroachment of plantations into the natural environment, particularly tropical forests. The impact on biodiversity is extensive and irreversible, and less food is being grown for local people.

*(www.upinsmokecoalition.org – Asia and the Pacific Report)*



# Sustainable Development

## Appendix 18: Principles to meet the climate change threat

The following principles have been identified by Sir John Houghton, former Chief Executive of the Met Office and chairman of the John Ray Initiative, which connects Environment, Science and Christianity ([www.jri.org.uk](http://www.jri.org.uk)).

Four widely accepted principles underlie the international agreements needed to meet the threat of climate change. These are:

- **The Precautionary Principle** (the need to take prudent action in the face of a potentially serious risk).
- **The Principle of Sustainable Development** (development which meets today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs).
- **The 'Polluter Pays' Principle** (the country, organisation or person that causes pollution should pay to put right the damage that it causes).
- **The Principle of Equity – both intergenerational and international** (each person in the world has the same right to use an equal amount of global environmental space or of the earth's resources).

### Questions:

- *Sir John Houghton famously described climate change as a "weapon of mass destruction". How far do you agree with him?*
- *What needs to happen in our political, economic and military systems for these principles to be met?*

- *It has been suggested that religious communities are almost the only institutions left in our society that have goals other than the accumulation of wealth for our existence here on this planet. How important do you feel religious communities are for building a sustainable future?*
- *What can you do in your parish and school communities to raise awareness of climate change and campaign for action?*



In his 1990 Message for World Peace Day, Pope John Paul II said: "When humans turn their backs on the Creator's plan, they provoke a disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of created order. If humans are not at peace with God, then Earth itself cannot be at peace."

In April 2007, Pope Benedict XVI sent a message to a Vatican seminar on climate change inviting everyone to adopt "a way of living, models of production and consumption marked by respect for creation and the need for sustainable development of peoples".

## Appendix 19: Can we turn it around?

Can we rely on it that a 'turning around' will be accomplished by enough people quickly enough to save the modern world? This question is often asked, but whatever answer is given to it will mislead. The answer "yes" would lead to complacency; the answer "no" to despair. It is desirable to leave these perplexities behind us and get down to work.

**E.F. Schumacher**

Perhaps the commonest circumstance under which societies fail to perceive a problem is when it takes the form of a slow trend concealed by wide up-and-down fluctuations. The prime example in modern times is global warming.

**Jared Diamond in  
'Collapse. How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive'**

And so while on the one hand, when we talk climate change, we're talking about reducing emissions, the entire economic model is based on increasing emissions and we have basically two options. We have the option of letting the remaining resources of the planet be fought over viciously through militarised power or we can move rapidly to the ability to rebuild our ecosystems, share the limited resources the planet can provide us, and create good lives while doing it.

**Vandana Shiva, from 'How to address humanity's global crises'**

<http://globalwarmingarchive.blogspot.com/2007/10/vandana-shiva-how-to-address-humanitys.html>

We have confronted the obstacles to prompt action and found them to be powerful and insidious. The industrial-consumption-oriented development model that characterises the richest countries and which others seek to emulate is driven by strong economic and political forces whose goal is primarily greater concentration of



*Battery chickens provide cheap meat for consumers. Little thought is given to their welfare.*

wealth. They have been undeniably effective in redefining in western cultures the meaning of personhood from a child of God and citizen of community to an insatiable consumer of products and services. With economic globalisation, this process is expanding worldwide.... But the dynamics behind the increasing threat of climate change lie not only in corporate boardrooms and around political cabinet tables. For those of us living in the wealthier industrialised countries, we find echoes of these destructive forces within our own lifestyles as participants in societies. Many in our countries are insidiously caught up in a materialistic culture and find it difficult to envision another way of living. One of the manifestations of evil may well be this dulling of vision of a way of living in communion with our Creator and all Creation.

**World Council of Churches,  
'Climate Change'**

<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/pa-booklet-climate1.pdf>

# Sustainable Development

## Reflection and Action Sheet 6

### Reflection

Bless Yahweh, my soul, Yahweh my God, how great you are!  
 Clothed in majesty and glory, wrapped in a robe of light!  
 You stretch the heavens out like a tent,  
 you build your palace on the waters above;  
 using the clouds as your chariot, you advance on the wings of the wind;  
 You use the winds as messengers and fiery flames as servants.  
 You fixed the earth on its foundations, unshakeable for ever and ever;  
 you wrapped it with the deep as with a robe, the waters overtopping the mountains.  
 At your reproof the waters took to flight, they fled at the sound of your thunder,  
 Cascading over the mountains, into the valleys,  
 Down to the reservoir you made for them;  
 You imposed the limits they must never cross again,  
 Or they would once more flood the land.  
 You set springs gushing in ravines, running down between the mountains,  
 supplying water for wild animals, attracting the thirsty wild donkeys;  
 Near there the birds of the air make their nests and sing among the branches.  
 From your palace you water the uplands  
 Until the ground has had all that your heavens have to offer.

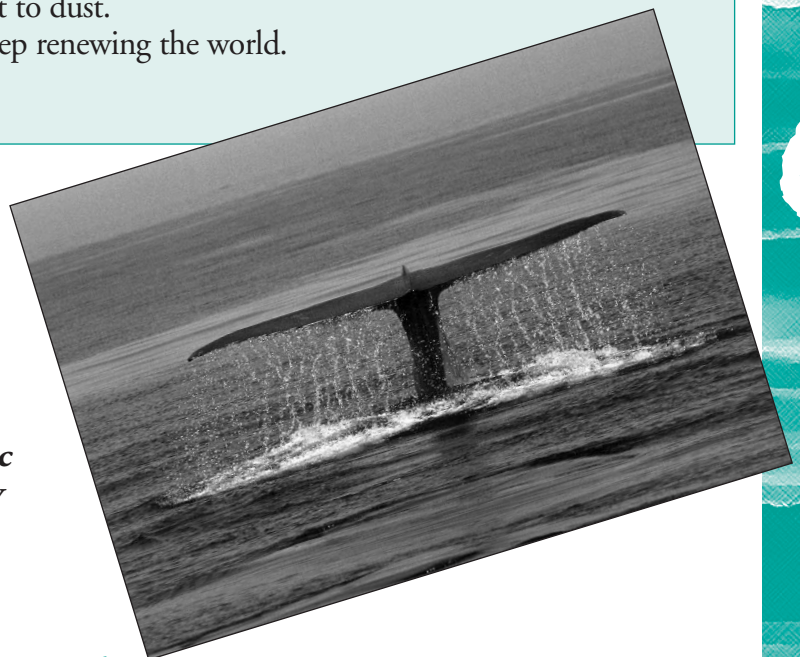
.....

..... Yahweh, what variety you have created, arranging everything so wisely!  
 Earth is completely full of the things you have made:  
 Among them vast expanse of ocean, teeming with countless creatures,  
 creatures large and small, with the ships going to and fro  
 and Leviathan whom you made to amuse you.  
 All creatures depend on you to feed them throughout the year;  
 You provide the food they eat, with generous hand you satisfy their hunger.  
 You turn your face away, they suffer,  
 you stop their breath, they die and revert to dust.  
 You give breath, fresh life begins, you keep renewing the world.

*Psalm 104: 1-13 and 24-30*

### Questions:

- **What does this passage mean to you in the light of the study and reflection undertaken during the series of meetings?**
- **What insights do we gain about basic principles for sustainable community from biblical and ethical reflection?**





## Action

**Revisit the goals of the Operation Noah campaign on Reading Sheet 1. Undertake to visit the website [www.operationnoah.org](http://www.operationnoah.org) regularly and support the various campaigning initiatives suggested. Keep in close contact with your MP over climate change. Let Operation Noah know the details of your group – particularly the group contact – and sign up to be kept in touch with events and follow-up materials through [campaigns@operationnoah.org](mailto:campaigns@operationnoah.org).**

Keep an eye on the *livesimply* campaign which focuses on Living Simply, Sustainably and in Solidarity with the Poor ([www.livesimply.org.uk](http://www.livesimply.org.uk)). Also, CAFOD's climate campaign ([www.cafod.org.uk/climatechange](http://www.cafod.org.uk/climatechange)).

Look at the liturgy ideas in the final section of this programme. Consider organising a special parish meeting and liturgy to conclude your study. This will create a forum for worship, but also a space to widen discussion for follow-up. See the website [www.ecen.org](http://www.ecen.org) for information about 'Environment' Sundays being put into the churches' diaries around Europe, and celebrating Creationtide between 1st September and mid October each year. Ensure that environmental justice features regularly in church worship.

### Lifestyle tips:

**Ethical Investment** is an important lifestyle choice. We are all called to apply our faith in every aspect of our daily living, from shopping to choosing where to invest our money. By collaborating with others we can increase awareness of what is environmentally sound. By letter-writing, lobbying, boycotting, purchasing fairly traded and/or locally sourced goods we can help safeguard the Earth and its peoples.

See [www.eccr.org.uk](http://www.eccr.org.uk)  
[www.ethicalinvestment.org.uk](http://www.ethicalinvestment.org.uk)  
[www.triodos.co.uk](http://www.triodos.co.uk) and [www.eiris.org](http://www.eiris.org)

For as little as £250 it is possible to join a cooperative which invests in wind energy projects that promote emission-free technology. Or you could 'adopt' a local renewables project. See, for example, Energy4All - [www.energy4all.co.uk](http://www.energy4all.co.uk). Yes2Wind is a coalition website which aims to provide information and resources for the public to support wind farms locally - [www.yes2wind.com](http://www.yes2wind.com). The British Wind Energy Association also provides a database on wind energy projects - [www.bwea.com/ukwed](http://www.bwea.com/ukwed).

Reflect upon car use as an individual and within the parish community. What measures are being taken to cut down carbon emissions from cars? Does your church have bicycle ramps? Do the local church schools encourage walking, public transport and car sharing?



Avoid flying as far as possible and cut down on business trips. Could you use phone or video-conferencing? And if you really do need to travel, go by train rather than car or plane – as well as often being quicker, you'll be able to get some work done. You can find alternative ways to travel at: [www.seat61.com](http://www.seat61.com).

**The booklet *101 Solutions. The DIY Guide to Climate Change* can be downloaded from [www.GreenhouseTrust.co.uk](http://www.GreenhouseTrust.co.uk)**