

Alliance of Religions and Conservation
Religions and the environment: Background information on
Christianity for pupils (to be used with ARC GCSE lesson plan 2)

Christian Assisi Declaration, 1986

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Key points

- God created everything that exists, freely, by his word, out of nothing. ...All creatures are... wholly dependent on him for their existence. By reason of its created origin each according to its species and all together in the harmonious unity of the universe manifest God's infinite truth and beauty.
- He created nothing unnecessarily and has omitted nothing that is necessary. (His) purpose is that through their interdependence they should bring to perfection the beauty of the universe.
- Man and woman, made in the likeness of God and entrusted with a unique dominion over all visible creatures. "You have made him little less than God, and you crown him with honour and glory. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands."
- Because of the responsibilities which flow from his dual citizenship, man's dominion cannot be understood as licence to abuse, spoil, squander or destroy what God has made to manifest his glory. That dominion cannot be anything other than a stewardship in symbiosis with all creatures. ...At the risk of destroying himself man may not reduce to chaos or disorder, or, worse still, destroy God's bountiful treasures.
- Every human act of irresponsibility towards creatures is an abomination.
- Christians believe that the first man's refusal to live according to divine wisdom introduced disharmony in to his relationship with God and creatures and this rebellion has perpetuated itself making it impossible for men and woman to live in concord with one and other and the rest of creation.
- But the heart of Christian faith resides in its proclamation of God's merciful fidelity to himself and to the works of his hands. ...Christians therefore cannot be pessimistic about the future of the world nor believe in its periodic disintegration and renewal, both of which would deny Christ's future coming to judge the living and the dead.

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- Saint Francis of Assisi... called all creatures his brothers and sisters because they are God's gifts and signs of his providential and reconciling love. ...St Francis recognised his divine duty to reciprocate divine love with love and praise. For St Francis... all human effort in the world must therefore lead to a mutual enrichment of man and creatures.
- Therefore, in the name of Christ, Christians repudiate ... all ill-considered exploitation of nature which threatens to destroy it and in turn make man the victim of degradation. (and) call upon all men and women to pursue... the priority of moral values over technological advances.

You can download the full text of the original Assisi declarations, including the Christian declaration, at: <http://tinyurl.com/c378tvw>

Christianity & the environment: Quotations from scriptures and others

"The Lord God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it" – Genesis 2:15

"When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have established; what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet, you have made him little less than God, and you crown him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands" – Psalm 8: 3-8

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered" – Jesus, in Luke 12: 6-7

"If God's providence bestows an unfailing supply of food on the birds of the air which neither sow nor reap, we ought to realise that the reason for people's supply running short is human greed. The fruits of the earth were given to feed all without distinction and nobody can claim any particular rights. Instead, we have lost the sense of the communion of goods, rushing to turn these goods into private property" – Bishop St Ambrose, 4th century

"The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant" – Isaiah 24:4-5

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“At stake, then, is not only a physical ecology that is concerned to safeguard the habitat of various living beings, but also a human ecology which makes the existence of creatures more dignified, by protecting the fundamental good of life in all its manifestations and by preparing for future generations an environment more in conformity with the Creator's plan” – Pope John Paul II, 2001

“We have to be prayerful people first – otherwise this whole [environment] deal becomes sheer activism. From a faith perspective, we've got to marry up our prayer and our action – the two go together” – Bishop Chris Toohey, TV interview, Oct 2007

“Climate change is an issue that impels us to think about God's justice and how we are to echo it in our world” – Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

“A way of life that disregards and damages God's creation, forces the poor into greater poverty, and threatens the right of future generations to a healthy environment and to their fair share of the earth's wealth and resources, is contrary to the vision of the Gospel” – Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, 2002

“Care of water resources and attention to climate change are matters of grave importance for the entire human family” – Pope Benedict XVI, September 2007

Christian Seven Year plans 2009-2016

Of the 31 long-term plans on the environment launched in 2009, 20 were from Christian traditions, ranging as far afield as the Armenian Orthodox Church to the Church of South India. Seven were from Catholic groups. The examples here are from the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales and the Church of England.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW)
Presented in 2009 to Bishop Declan Lang, Bishop for Environmental Justice, International Affairs Department CBCEW. Summary of Recommended Commitments:

Celebration

- Celebrate the beauty of creation through liturgy and music and recognise a Creation Time in the year.

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- Make church grounds a manifestation of care for the earth so that they form part of, and celebrate, our understanding of our role in nature.

Education and Young People

- Develop a sense of awe and wonder for creation in our young people through all subjects and ground them in a spiritual awareness of the need to care for creation.
- Actively encourage green living, gardening and food in all our schools and places of education. We encourage all to do environmental audits and track their progress.
- Share their experiences, ideas and challenges of what it is to be environmentally responsible and sensitive to nature.

Lifestyles

- Encourage car sharing, cycling or public transport.
- Observe Lent as a time of reflection on all our relationships, including our relationship with the rest of creation.
- Encourage everyone to understand that a simple lifestyle involves finding joy outside of consumerism.

Wisdom and Guidance

- Re-discover and learn more about those prophets and saints who cared for creation.
- Use the Sacraments as a means to a deeper understanding of our relationship with God through the gifts of nature.
- Promote the theology of creation in all places of learning and formation.
- Promote environmentally sensitive pilgrimages and re-discover ancient routes that deepen our understanding of our past, present and future spiritual relationship with the natural world.

Media and Advocacy

- Explore new media and its potential for informing and inspiring a spiritual approach to the earth.
- Encourage all diocesan and other institutions' communication departments to spread the good news about what is happening and best practice.

Partnerships and Eco-Twinning

- Form partnerships within and without the Church to gain a greater understanding of environmental issues and how they are affecting local, national and international issues.

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- To be aware of how environmental issues are affecting other parts of the world and affecting people's lives, perhaps through existing twinning relationships.
- Support groups, such as the diocesan Justice and Peace Commissions, working for environmental justice.
- Engage in dialogue with other Christians on work in this area.
- Encourage interfaith dialogue on an understanding of the environment.

Assets

- Encourage environmental audits and track their progress.
- Manage land associated with all Catholic buildings in an environmentally sensitive way.
- Further promote an ethical purchasing policy, which is already underway.

Church and Earth 2009-2016: The Church of England's Seven-Year Plan on Climate Change and the Environment

Prepared for the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England, October 2009

In 2006 the Church of England launched *Shrinking The Footprint*, a campaign within and beyond the Church aimed at reducing the Church's carbon footprint by 80% by 2050. It has already led to energy saving in Church of England properties, the use of solar power and environmental investments.

The underpinning principles of *Shrinking The Footprint* are:

- Putting Christian values into action: responding responsibly and joyfully as co-workers in God's care for creation
- Acting on best available scientific evidence
- Putting our own house in order to serve as a signpost and example.
- Engaging in partnership and local action at parish level.
- As the established church (work) with other organisations for the common cause of climate change mitigation, adaptation and environmental care.

By 2016 the scope of *Shrinking the Footprint* will expand through:

- Continued core activity with further action to measure, monitor and reduce the carbon footprint of the Church;

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- Expansion of the scope with successive phases to cover reduction of our ecological footprint (waste, water, food, travel) and to enrich the environment (biodiversity and land);
- Development of the Climate Justice Fund, a voluntary scheme for church members to contribute to projects for climate change adaptation in developing countries;
- Establishment of strategic partnerships with organisations in the voluntary, public and private sectors to reduce carbon and ecological footprints;
- Enhancement and strengthening of the Church's contribution to interfaith cooperation upon environmental matters.

This will also include:

- Working with public and voluntary schemes for Education For Sustainable Development;
- Encouraging all 4,700 church schools to become sustainable;
- Integrate environmental issues into all work with young people;
- Encouraging all dioceses to become Fairtrade partners;
- Develop effective church involvement in communities suffering from flooding and other impacts as well as in Transition Towns and Low Carbon Communities;
- Work with partners to ensure poor communities are not put at risk by necessary increases in energy prices;
- Continue to testify to the need for change, lobbying for ambitious action on climate change and other ecological crises and for policies to protect the interests of poorest and most vulnerable people worldwide;
- Develop ideas for interfaith collaboration in environmental action
- Hold annual festivals and services celebrating Creation Time; running courses and events; commissioning art works and musical pieces inspired by *Shrinking The Footprint* and Climate Justice.

Examples of Christian Environmental Action

KwaZulu Natal, South Africa – Eco-coffins

<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=505>

In South African Christian communities there is pressure on even the poorest of families to spend heavily on a funeral for their loved ones.

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In a country where the death toll from HIV/Aids alone has run at 400,000 a year, this cost can bankrupt a family, causing terrible hardship.

Meanwhile, in the rural areas of KwaZulu Natal the environment is threatened by the spread of invasive trees which deplete the soil of goodness for farmed crops and consume massive amounts of underground water causing wells to dry up.

Teams of workers were clearing away these trees as part of a water conservation project, and a chance 2005 meeting between the project manager and ARC Secretary-General Martin Palmer led to the idea of using the waste wood from the trees to make cost-effective coffins for poor families.

By 2011 the EcoCoffin project was making 70 coffins a day and has begun to export to other African countries as well as making school and church furniture – all from waste wood. The business not only pays for the environmentally essential tree clearance work but also trains unemployed people to work in the production side.

UK – National Network of Environmental Action

The Church of England has linked 5,000 parishes across the country into a 'Parish Pump' network, promoting environmental awareness and action. This includes using churchyards as natural reserves and the planting of yew saplings propagated from ancient trees.

Columbia River, US/Canada – fight for environmental restoration

In 1999 two archbishops and six bishops representing 1.5 million Catholics in Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Washington, and British Columbia, called for urgent action to stop the degradation of the 1,200-mile-long Columbia River. After extensive consultation with scientists, policy-makers, environmentalists, indigenous peoples, theologians and others, they developed a five-year strategy to tackle major problems including pollution, spread of alien species and destruction of wildlife habitats.

USA – United Methodist Church pioneers ethical investment

The United Methodist Church has moved all its \$13bn pension fund into ethical investments and is encouraging its seven million congregational members to do the same with their own savings. It is playing a significant role in encouraging other faiths to move to socially responsible investment.