

Caring for the Environment : Ideas for positive action

Last year the state of the environment rose up everyone's agenda. Worldwide there was a series of extreme weather events, resulting in devastating droughts and wild fires in California, Greece and Australia; intense hurricanes in Eastern U.S.A, a massive typhoon in Japan; torrential rain and flooding in East Africa and India, the worst for 100 years. Not to mention a heatwave in the U.K. It almost seemed like the start of the apocalypse. Following these disasters an influential scientific report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change put the blame squarely on mankind polluting the planet and called for urgent action to be taken by governments, particularly on the need to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide we emit into the atmosphere. They warned that we need to act soon or it will be too late for us to halt the expected rise in global temperatures.

The worldwide community responded by getting together to debate a way forward. Yet what can you tell me about the United Nations Climate Change Conference held last December in Katowice, Poland? Very little I suspect as the news agenda has been dominated by Brexit and this important conference was virtually ignored by the media. The last major international summit was the Paris Climate Change Agreement of 2015, and this latest conference in Katowice was to ratify a set of guidelines for implementing the earlier agreement.

The good news to report is that 184 countries have now adopted the agreement which aims to limit global warming to well under 2 degrees centigrade, or even 1.5 degrees by the end of this century. Getting all these countries to agree to something substantial was a large step forward. However, although most of the world is on board a certain American president treats the whole idea of climate change as 'fake news' and ignored the conference. Any success achieved has been somewhat muted as the agreement was not endorsed by the U.S.A., or indeed any of the other major oil producers including Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

You might think that this scuppers the whole project, and one might be forgiven for losing faith that our leaders can achieve enough in the limited time available. But don't give up yet. As Mohamed Adow of Christian Aid has said of the conference:

'The most hopeful stories about climate change over the past two weeks have been from outside the walls of the summit. School children striking for their future, grass roots movements mobilising and even the world's biggest shipping firm, Maersk, announcing it will go net zero emissions by 2050. The global transition is under way and cannot be stopped.'

Looking ahead with positivity we, as a church, are part of this movement too, not just in terms of reducing carbon dioxide but in general for improving our environment for future generations. Ignore the President Trumps of this world. We can do our bit. We can't change the whole world but we can make changes in our own lives and immediate surroundings; even small changes can make an impact.

So what can we do at St Mary's? I have written before about our church's environment policy and our commitment. Yet to quote the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby: *'We must not just state our beliefs: we must live them out'*. So what can we do? As part of our church's environment policy I have drawn up a list of actions that we, as a church and as individuals, can take to improve our environment. These are set out below. I would ask that you read through the actions. They are not exhaustive and I would welcome any comments and feedback from anyone who has ideas about what we should be doing. Together we can make a difference.

ACTIONS TO IMPROVE OUR ENVIRONMENT

The list below is not exhaustive and is to be reviewed and revised on a regular basis.

The PCC will appoint an Environmental Officer to guide implementation of the policy, who will report back to the PCC on a regular basis.

The Environmental Officer will ensure awareness of environmental legislation and seek information to identify proven good practice.

We will have regular communication with church members to encourage an awareness of environmental matters, eg by notices and by articles in our monthly parish magazine.

We will co-operate with other churches, faith and community groups in environmental initiatives and share information and experience where this can be helpful. A good starting point is through Goldington Churches Together.

Improve wildlife habitats in the churchyard – An initial wildlife survey should be undertaken.

We will conduct an Energy Audit of our heating, lighting and other appliances to see where economies and improvements can be made eg. by fitting LED light bulbs.

Turn off lights, appliances and computers when not in use.

Use email appropriately to reduce paper waste.

Recycle office supplies and products such as cartridges, plastics, batteries.

Maximise the proportion of paper and card used from recycled and sustainable sources.

Use sustainable building supplies whenever possible, such as fair-traded textiles and timber from renewable sources.

Share lifts to church.

Make maximum use of recycling bins.

Use environmentally 'green' cleaning products.

Support the Fairtrade stall and encourage the use of Fairtrade products.

This is a work in progress and I would welcome any ideas for adding to the list of 'Actions' that we can take.

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St Mary's

Environmental Officer