

Archdiocese of Birmingham Environmental Policy

Introduction: **From the Bishops' Statement 'Guardians of Creation':**

[Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales \(cbcew.org.uk\)](http://cbcew.org.uk)

Educating towards a Christian Spiritual of Ecology

"We are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness." (Laudato Si, 53). Our Christian responsibility for the planet begins with appreciation of the goodness of all of God's creation:

"God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen 1:31)

"Our Sister, Mother Earth,"⁶ "now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her."⁷ Expert study points to a devastating losses in biodiversity, with up to a million species facing extinction,⁸ and an estimated 1.0°C of global warming since pre-industrial levels. This warming is already manifesting itself in changes to the intensity and frequency of climate and weather extremes, impacting on natural and human systems.⁹ The worst impacts are felt by developing countries¹⁰ and by populations that are already disadvantaged or vulnerable.¹¹

Pope Francis states that our relationship with the planet has become confrontational, (L.Si 106) based on the illusion of unlimited growth on a planet with finite resources. This risks leaving a degraded environment for future generations. In the past, a lack of understanding could be claimed, but ***harm done going forward is done with full knowledge of the impact our activities. Younger generations are not blind to this fact. We must both consider the kind of world we want to leave to children who are now growing up. (L.Si 160) and find responsible ways of doing so.***

Discerning the threats to our common home

Scientists talk of 'tipping points' in ecosystems and in global warming which, once reached, could plunge us into a much changed environment from which it will be difficult, if not impossible, to find our way out. If we are to avoid such scenarios, a concerted effort and widespread change to our current lifestyles will be necessary. ***These include approximately halving our carbon emissions, globally, by 2030 at the latest.***¹⁵

This is not a primarily scientific concern. Pope St John Paul II explained that "the seriousness of the ecological issue lays bare the depth of man's moral crisis."¹⁶ Pope Francis reminds us ***that everything is interconnected, that we are faced with a complex crisis that is both environmental and social, and that "genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others."***¹⁷

The challenge before us is to learn to care, in the same breath, not only for the beauty of God's creation, its bounteous biodiversity and life sustaining ecosystems, but also for the unborn, the elderly, those who are victims of exploitation, and others thrown away by a society focused on the satisfaction of our supposed needs as consumers.¹⁸

A Catholic Response

It is possible to change course. Scientific research gives us an insight into what our future earth may look like. But all projections depend on the actions that we take today. We must take action urgently.

Central to this challenge will be the development of a Christian spirituality of ecology, and a call to a new lifestyle, beginning in personal and family life. The crisis we face is a summons to a profound interior conversion, whereby the effects of our relationship with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us. (L.Si 217)

As disciples, we are invited to be part of the redeeming mission of Christ, and to approach our task with joy and gratitude.

A Way Forward...

We look to avoid the worst consequences of this ecological crisis by engaging now and over the next decade on this 'long path to renewal.'

As Bishops, we will review the 'Call of Creation' to reflect on our present situation and to promote good practice for diocese, parishes, schools, families and individuals. We need a more considered relationship with our God, our neighbour and the earth through the way we manage our resources as a Church.

We, the Bishops of England and Wales commit ourselves and invite our people to engage in this urgent challenge, so that together we show leadership by our actions.

Let us pray for wisdom and courage for the path ahead.

Statement of Principles.

1. This policy sets out the following overarching principles which apply to the whole community and from which the detailed policy actions follow.
2. All of Diocesan life and work is to be guided by this policy as part of our mission to care for God's gift of Creation.
3. We will raise awareness of and become fully educated in the issues concerning the damage being done to God's creation, particularly damage that results in injustice, violence and the life-threatening effects of climate change.
4. We will judge all decisions against the exhortation in Laudato Si to "hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor." This includes all economic decisions, actions taken as a consumer and investments.
5. We will support and work with all relevant church agencies, including ecumenical bodies, for the positive environmental change to which we all aspire.
6. We must all live and practice our faith mindful of the requirement in Catholic Social Teaching to live sustainably.
7. We have appointed a person as our Environmental Lead, to lead our programme and encourage him or her to bring relevant environmental issues and concerns forward to the PCC on a regular basis. We will include our concern for sustainability in our worship and teaching, especially observing Climate Sunday, the Season of Creation and similar.
8. We will undertake an environmental and energy audit of church and school premises and property, identify the most significant issues and impacts which should be addressed and make and implement plans and programmes to tackle them, recognising that some additional costs may be incurred to minimise environmental impacts

9. We will work with others in our local community to identify environmental issues which should be addressed in our area and help develop actions to tackle them.