

**Church of England
Diocese of London**



The Environmental Challenge

**CLIMATE, SCIENCE,
JUSTICE, ACTION**

September 2009

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Our World

- o The natural elements
- o Earth, water, air
- o Ice, heat – wood, fire
- o Brown, green, blue – red!
- o Plants, animals, people
- o Country and cities
- o Our Church
- o Energy and carbon; water and waste; fauna and flora



**“God who made the earth,
the air, the sky, the sea –
Who gave the light its birth –
careth for me.”**

Sarah B Rhodes

Shrinking the footprint
www.shrinkingthefootprint.co.uk @sgfootprint



This presentation explores how we can meet our responsibilities to God’s creation, and those with whom we share it – as a church, and in our parishes and communities.

But – what is our environment, our World?

Well it’s everything natural around us – the earth, the water, the air. We have an effect on all of these – perhaps the air especially is the problem which worries us most right now. The world is heating up, ice is melting, forests are burning.

God also cares for us in our urban environments. The upper sign photographed here, on a wall in the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark, reads: “Nobody is Not Loved” – to which someone has added a second sign under it: “Yeah Yeah Yippee Yippee Yah”!

The last bullet highlights three pairs of issues which we want to focus on in each of our churches: ‘energy and carbon, water and waste, fauna and flora’.

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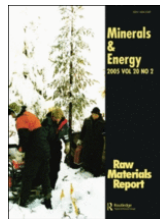
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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Resources

- o Air, food, water
- o Shelter, warmth, fuel
- o Clothes
- o Security
- o Employment
- o Transport
- o Family/ friends
- o Recreation



“Play our Wants and Needs game to find out how good you are at distinguishing between a want and a need. Think about what things you need in order to survive, develop, to be protected and to be included.”

Unicef

Minerals & Energy/

www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713789630~db=all

Shrinking the footprint

www.shrinkingthefootprint.org.uk/

London Challenge
2012

‘Wants’ and ‘needs’ once meant the same thing.

That famous opening sentence of Jane Austen’s ‘Pride and Prejudice’ reads:–

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a young man in possession of a good fortune, must be ‘in want of’ a wife.”

But not a carriage with four horses, nor the ticket to spending the ‘season’ in London and Bath – rich people of those days had those things already.

Our modern Mr Darcys – most of the rest of us too – mean by our ‘wants’ a great deal more than such luxuries of yesteryear. Not all of them may be considered true needs.

Yet our God-given human capacities do give rise to real wants – of a cultural, recreational and spiritual kind. Without these, life would be hard. We are not just creatures of flesh and blood.

Millions of people have to do without the necessities. They can hardly aspire to our air tickets or iPods. Undeveloped countries want first to achieve the same level as the West, before cutting their carbon emissions. Why should they not have what we enjoy already? Yet, how can they do this without generating more of the emissions which are the very reasons for climate change and the injustices it causes?

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Climate change

- o Average world temperature rose by 0.7 - 0.8C in 90 years
 - up by 0.3 - 0.4C from 1910s to 40s
 - apparently down 0.1C from 1940s to 70s
 - up by 0.4 - 0.55C from 1970s to 2000s
- o Medieval warm period some 0.5C cooler than now
- o Hottest years since 1850: 1998 & 2005, 2003, 2002, 2004
- o Ten warmest all in the last twelve – 2008 was 10th warmest
- o 2000s already 0.2C average above 1990s

“... Warming ... has penetrated into the ... oceans over the past 40 years. The signal ... varies widely by ocean; it cannot be explained by natural internal climate variability ... but is well simulated by two anthropogenically forced climate models. We conclude that it is of human origin.”



BBC website 2006

*Dr Tim Barnett & six others,
Scripps Institution of Oceanography,
California, 2005*

Shrinking the footprint
www.shrinkingthefootprint.cifs.org/scan.org



Here is a brief summary of current knowledge on climate change.

Think of the time since the early 20th century as three successive phases of three decades each. Overall there has been a rise in temperature of up to about $\frac{3}{4}$ of one degree. That might not seem like much, but it has been enough to result in quite turbulent weather – droughts as well as heatwaves, massive flooding in several countries. Temperature extremes fluctuate several times more than the average; and they tend to be more pronounced on land than at sea.

It has also caused a rise in sea levels of about 20 cm already, just by the thermal expansion of water – even before melting ice contributes to sea level rises.

Most of the rise took place in the first and third periods, most of all in the last 30 years. In the late 20th c, there was an upward acceleration. Warming has not ceased in the 21st century as some are claiming, but there may now be a lull till perhaps the mid to late 2010s. There also appears to have been a dip during the middle three-decade period – thought to have been caused by atmospheric aerosols.

It is often said that in earlier warm periods, during Roman and early medieval times, vineyards grew in southern England! Well they do now, too. And it wasn't necessarily equally warm all over the world in those days: warmer and cooler periods in the Far East and possibly the USA appear not to have coincided. And it might have been less easy then to source any French wine, whenever you fancied it!

On average, the last decade is thought to have been the warmest for 1000 years at least. The quotation at the foot of the slide is taken from a fairly recent authoritative report on warming of the oceans, which strongly supports the belief that the warming which is going on is caused by us humans.

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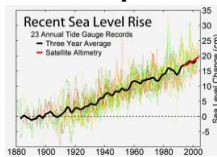
THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Science and evidence

- o Temperature measurements – land, sea and air
- o Greenhouse gas measurements, Pacific and elsewhere
- o Local observations eg arctic sea ice, glaciers
- o Sea levels, mid-tide at datum points
- o Acidification of rain and sea
- o Balloons and satellites
- o Ice cores, Antarctica
- o Tree rings, corals, sea sediments

“The greenhouse effect was discovered by Joseph Fourier in 1824 and ... first investigated ... by Svante Arrhenius in 1896. It is the process by which absorption and emission of infrared radiation by atmospheric gases warm a planet's lower atmosphere and surface.”

www.science.tv



Wikipedia Commons

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www.shrinkingthefootprint.org



These are the main sources of evidence on which climate scientists base their conclusions. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which advises the UN, relies largely on such evidence.

Some measurements are taken at widely varying points around the world. Some are more local. Greenhouse gas measurements were taken only in Hawaii, to begin with (from 1958); now they come from more than 300 stations in 66 countries. Ice cores and tree rings yield what is basically archaeological evidence. This does require some interpretation, but it is generally consistent with current live data.

Altogether, there is now rather a substantial body of evidence to draw on. It would be a tough task to discredit so much evidence; it comes from independent sources, but they support each other.

The prevailing view is that the warming we see is almost certainly linked to the production of CO₂ and other gases by the well-known 'greenhouse effect'. The greenhouse effect is not at all a new idea, it is solid science, tried and tested. That is not to discount all other factors, but they play a secondary role.

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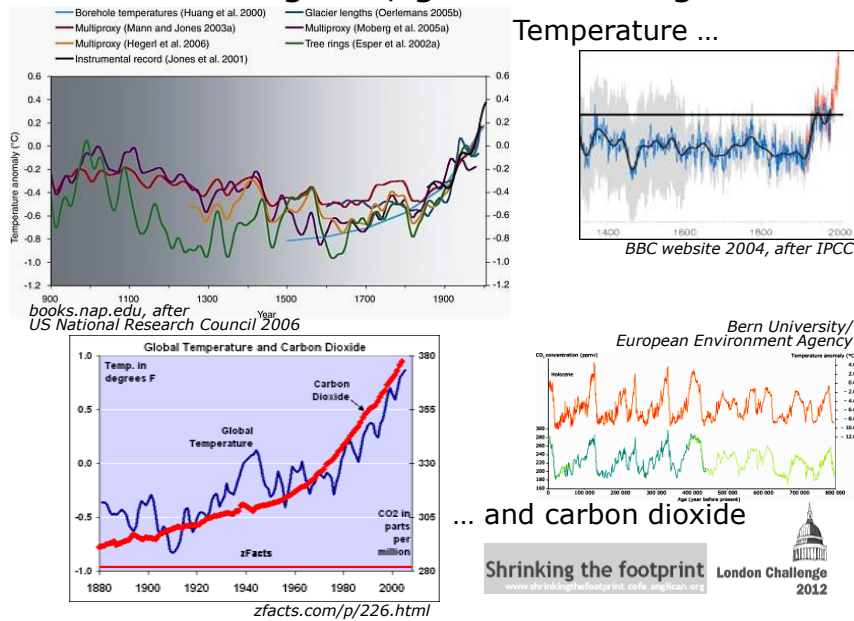
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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Greenhouses gases, global warming



Here is some more evidence, in graphic form.

The top left of the four boxes plots temperatures – measured or deduced in various ways – from AD 900 to the present. The lines wander up and down quite a lot, but the rise in recent decades is still very obvious.

That's what the second graph, on the upper right, shows. It spans the shorter period from 1400 to the present. The graph is often called the 'hockey stick', because of its shape. There has been some scepticism that such a startling trend could possibly occur – but it has been re-calculated using different methods, and has come out pretty much the same.

The opinion of most climate scientists is that these rises in temperature are 'associated with' the amount of carbon dioxide, CO₂, which is put into the atmosphere by us humans (as well as certain other gases), by means of the so-called 'greenhouse effect'. Now, CO₂ is not a pollutant, and the greenhouse effect is nothing sinister, both are perfectly natural – indeed life relies on them both. It is just that there is too much. Sugar is natural and health-giving, but if one has too much it can cause diabetes. Arguably alcoholic drink in moderation is not a poison, but too much will wreck the liver!

There is a striking correspondence between changes in temperature, and the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere. The two lower graphs go back 1¼ centuries (left) and 800,000 years (right, this based on ice cores in Antarctica). The highs and lows and many of the variations between obviously follow each other – this can't be a coincidence (although they may not always follow in the same order).

Short term trends are not so obvious. We still get some cold winters and 'disappointing' summers in the UK! But there has been a general rise in temperatures over the last century, and this is largely due to the increase in CO₂ in the air.

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Scenarios

- o Ice-free arctic summers, melting glaciers
- o Northwest passage open, longer growing seasons
- o Rising sea levels, cities flooding, deltas/ islands submerged
- o Extreme weather, heatwaves, flash floods
- o Drying up of lakes and rivers
- o Famine, drought, expanding deserts
- o Mass migrations, social breakdown
- o Resources conflicts
- o Increased species extinctions



blog.wired.com/wiredscience

“We have seen the consequences of ignoring risk in the current economic ... crisis ... The risk consequences of ignoring climate change will be very much bigger ...”

Nicholas, Lord Stern

Shrinking the footprint
www.shrinkingthefootprint.org


London Challenge
2012

If we carry on as we are, we are heading for a catastrophe. Even emissions quite a lot less than at our present level would have disastrous results. That is why we have to cut CO₂ emissions by at least 80% by 2050.

This slide lists some of the results of climate change which are likely if we don't take drastic action to curb emissions. These are scenarios; they are not all certainties, nor equally probable – that depends on what we do and how soon, among other things.

It isn't all gloom; at the top of the list it is acknowledged that there may be benefits for some people. It might be easier to grow wheat in Siberia (though buildings in the region would have to be rebuilt to deal with subsidence)! Some commentators (the BBC Weather website for example) are much more optimistic about the benefits, even for the UK.

This seems naïve at best. The price to pay includes much of Bangladesh and other delta areas permanently under water, several Pacific islands entirely submerged, drought across China and SE Asia, the Sahara and Arabian desert region expanding, parts of southern Europe such as Greece and Spain reduced to semi-desert, regional scale forest fires, huge flows of refugees, resources wars, probably many animals and plants wiped out.

The direct or indirect consequences for the whole world would exclude almost anywhere from the hoped-for blessings of balmy isolation!

Climate change is not the only factor likely to lead to some of the outcomes in this slide. It is one cause, probably the main cause – but the most dangerous consequences are likely to be the outcome of several factors reacting on each other – questions of politics and security, as well as economic, health and climate factors.

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Reasons for action

- o Public policy, C of E policy, diocesan policy
- o Christian belief and duty
- o “Faith without works is dead”
- o Faith, hope and charity
- o Justice and kindness, prudence and altruism
- o Moral authority
- o Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- o Energy supplies and security
- o Financial stewardship
- o Sustainable lifestyles
- o This generation, future generations
- o Survival



**“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.”**

Hebrews 11:1

Shrinking the footprint



www.dowdlefolkart.com/images/artwork/Amish---Father.gif

Some people may wonder, is there enough reason to take action on climate change and the environment? It may cost money! It might divert us from our mission! It may be a waste of time if no-one else does the same! Won't our efforts be swamped by the growth of emissions in China or India?!

Well, the organisation we belong to has committed itself to determined action in this area – and our beliefs and our Christian duty should reinforce this commitment. The command to take care of creation is foundational. Not to do that would make nonsense of our faith. St James wrote: “Faith without works is dead”. That applies to climate action as much as in his original context of social justice. Climate change is indeed a matter of justice.

How we act on this also concerns our personal character. We must cultivate sustainable lifestyles. And the moral authority of the Church will only be accepted and listened to when we have put our own house in order.

The actions we should take are needed, not only to mitigate climate change and adapt to its consequences, but to maintain energy supplies. We also want to keep down costs, which is a simple question of financial stewardship.

Let us also care for the wellbeing of future generations. How can we compare the value of future life with the here-and-now? We need to cultivate broader horizons in time as well as space.

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Justice and fairness

- o Rich/ poor, powerful/ powerless
- o Developed and developing worlds
- o Pacific and Indian Ocean states
- o History and responsibility
- o Sharing and equity
- o 'Contraction and convergence'
- o Imports, exports, food miles and fair trade
- o Obligations to the young/ future generations



www.guardian.co.uk

“In the aftermath of disaster ... boys often go ... with their fathers to rescue livestock and tools, girls are made to stay at home with their mothers ... at risk of the house ... collapsing, further flood, snake bites; and not able to escape the dirty water.”

Guardian/ Plan Bangladesh

Shrinking the footprint



There are big issues of justice around the subject of climate change and related environmental concerns. The slide indicates some of the questions involved.

We in the UK may not have caused climate change single-handedly by starting the industrial revolution. It did make a big contribution, but it also brought great benefits which are more and more widely shared (some might now have to be foregone).

On the other hand, we are immensely privileged to be born into an affluent society with many advantages of geography and history. Others are not so fortunate.

Moreover, we are still adding CO₂ to the air more than the world as a whole, on average. We outsource the manufacture of almost all our luxuries – yet still complain that CO₂ is produced by the factories in China which make them for us.

There are also questions of justice within other societies, independent of us, such as the plight of women and girls in many societies. We ought to think whether we are buying from countries where workers are treated fairly.

It isn't only future generations who will suffer. Many people and places are starting to feel the effects of climate change already. The reality of climate change will catch up with most of the world's population now living, maybe sooner than we think! It is not a question just for the distant future and persons yet unborn.

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Carteret Islands

- o Island community near New Guinea
- o One island cut in two
- o Fresh water contaminated
- o Abandoned April 2009
- o The first to succumb to sea level rises
- o Who's next?
- o Responsibility and justice



www.theecologist.org/PAGES/archive_detail.asp?content_id=2114

“Climate change is not just about statistics. Climate change is not just about science. Climate change is about human rights.”

*Ursula Rakora,
former Carteret Islander*

Shrinking the footprint
www.shrinkingthefootprint.org/scan.org


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Here is a prime example. As of April 2009, the Carteret Islands (close to Papua New Guinea) have become the first entire community to be evacuated from their homeland due to climate change. This is a milestone in history.

They have seen it coming for some time, yet powerless to stop it. The water has been lapping over the islands at high tide. Now one of the islands is permanently cut in two, and the fresh water supplies are contaminated by seawater. That could be open to a technological solution – but for how long, and at what cost?

The question of justice is brought into sharp focus by this. Those most affected by climate change are mostly those who have contributed least to its occurrence.

Other issues are faced for example in sub-saharan Africa, where deserts expand, the rains fail and the crops don't grow. Many African populations have never industrialised, living sustainable lives since time immemorial. The rest of us expanded into the farthest corners of the globe; when the resources of each successive place we have 'conquered' have become over-exploited, we've sought less and less sustainable ways to achieve the comforts we depend on!

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Responses

- o Prevention/ avoidance?
- o Time-lag/ turnaround time
- o Mitigation – reducing our impact
- o Adaptation – for living in an altered world
- o Preparation – thinking, planning, praying
- o Reclamation – hope, for a different future
- o Communication – family, friends and neighbours
- o Cooperation – communities, church and state

African landscape



“No-one made a greater mistake than he who did nothing, because he could only do a little.”

Edmund Burke

Shrinking the footprint



www.christianaid.org.uk/issues/climatechange/facts/index.aspx /
Glynn Griffiths

Well then – in St Paul’s words – “What shall we say unto these things?”
Or as the Gospels put it, “What must we do to be saved?”

Before going on to more detailed areas for action, we might like to highlight the kinds of response which could be attempted.

We might have hoped to avoid or prevent climate change altogether – but regrettably that is no longer on the cards. There is thought to be a time-lag of about 30 years between the CO₂ emissions and their effect on the climate. Therefore we may have to live with the consequences of the last 30 year’s emissions, whatever we do now.

It is also thought that the CO₂ we emit takes a century at the very least to be absorbed by the oceans and the trees, and then no more than 50% is being mopped up in this way. The world is like a supertanker, which may take as much as seven decades or even more to turn around!

So we need to start thinking about mitigation and adaptation.

Mitigation is about reducing the damage we cause as much as possible; adaptation means developing lifestyles which will be least vulnerable to those impacts that we can’t deflect quick enough. Communities need to learn to support one another – as they have done at past times of crisis in history, when they were less in a position to see it coming than we are now.

Ultimately we need to communicate a spirit of hope and trust in God’s provision in all ways – especially where we are helpless to influence the outcome – as we must be to a large extent, with something as intangible and intractable as the weather.

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Climate Justice Fund

- o The C of E's national environmental fund
 - Spin-off from Shrinking the Footprint campaign
 - In partnership with Tearfund
 - www.climatejusticefund.org.uk
- o Three initial projects
 - Tanzania, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo
 - Criteria for selection – effectiveness, sustainability
 - Future extension? – Mozambique or Angola?
- o Not same as offsetting – adaptation not mitigation
 - Additionality – mitigation and adaptation
 - Lower emissions, less to offset and adapt to?
 - Complex message – how communicate?
- o Launch – Lambeth Palace, 7 September 2009
 - Individuals, parishes, dioceses – recruitment
- o UK Government/ £60 bn pa international adaptation fund?



“The potential compensation for climate change impacts would make the tobacco pay-outs look like peanuts.”

*Peter Roderick,
Climate Justice Programme*

Shrinking the footprint

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2012

www.community.travelchinaguide.com/photo/8101/81013223232797.jpg

The Church of England's new Climate Justice Fund has just been launched. This is a spin-off from the Shrinking the Footprint campaign, and an outcome of the General Synod's July 2008 debate on 'Climate Change and Human Security'.

It is being set up in partnership with, and run by, Tearfund.

Tearfund has established criteria for selection of projects to be supported by this Fund. The criteria are summarised as 'effectiveness and sustainability'. There is a possibility of extending to further projects than the initial three, when the fund has become well established.

Adaptation is not mitigation. We need both – though whether offsetting is a sufficient means of mitigating impacts is debatable. We should be mindful of the need to set aside funds for direct mitigation, eg insulation, installing renewable energy.

The Climate Justice Fund is not to be confused with a proposal by the UK Government for an international adaptation fund. But they should complement each other. The C of E's fund will be accessing private funds, whereas any international fund would be inter-governmental and funded mainly from aid budgets.

It is also not to be confused with climate change law. But this does illustrate how people may have tangible claims for compensation due to environmental damage. Cases are already going through the courts, especially in the US, for compensation by companies who have inflicted damage through developments which may not have been properly risk assessed first. The Climate Justice Programme is sponsoring these.

Cherie Booth QC is one famous face much associated with questions of law and justice in human relations.

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Carbon accounting and off-setting

- o Tree planting – UK, overseas
- o Travel – air, sea, rail
- o Carbon pricing/ other ways of measuring
- o Emissions trading – UK cap and trade, EU ETS
- o Carbon disclosure project
 - Corporate members
 - Supply chains
- o Adaptation funding
- o Technology transfer/ money payments
- o Additionality



“A single tree can absorb a tonne of CO₂ over its lifetime.”

Carbon Managers

Shrinking the footprint



www.carbonmanagers.com/tree-planting.aspx?gclid=CPehp7jq15kCFQ0vQgodli8jmg

Once a person or organisation's carbon emissions have been reduced as far as possible, what remains should be offset. Usually this is done by paying for tree planting, through a reputable UK or overseas organisation. This is very much a last resort, after all other measures have been tried – offsetting does not provide an excuse for keeping one's emissions at their original level. It is also important to make sure that the projects being paid for would not have happened anyway, and/or that money released thereby is spent in an environmentally responsible way.

How much money is needed to offset a particular level of emissions depends on carbon pricing. This is a complex matter: it must be a fair valuation, not a phoney one which may be much too low – like some emissions trading schemes have so far proved to be. Trees will not absorb the carbon till decades after it has been emitted. And the trading or offsetting scheme will take a proportion from contributions, for administration.

All means of travel generate some emissions. Journeys by plane and ship may actually be much the same per mile – but of course longer journeys cannot reasonably be made by sea, so it is not a fair comparison. What matters is whether the journey is needed at all. And if it is, better if possible to go by rail.

The Carbon Disclosure Project is an information service for the world's major companies to disclose their emissions. In the same way, an organisation can obtain information about the practices and emissions of its suppliers. Bulk buying from the greenest companies is a good way of helping drive down the causes of global warming.

We must also help those most affected by climate change to adapt to its impacts. We will all have to adapt in the end – but mainly it is Third World countries which are suffering already from drought and regional-wide flooding. Adaptation payments are in addition to mitigating and reducing climate change. Offsetting and adaptation are not alternatives; both are needed.

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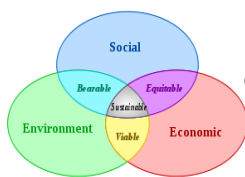
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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ World development

- o Sustainability
- o Sustainable development?
- o Sustainable cities
- o 'Our Common Future'
- o Rich and poor/ developed, developing, undeveloped
- o 'Earth' Summits/ 'World' Summits?
- o ALMA – Mozambique, Angola
- o Tearfund
- o The Climate Justice Fund
- o Fair trade
- o Eco-twinning



“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Proverbs 31: 8-9

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en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development

The concept of sustainability became famous in 1987 with the UN Brundtland Report 'Our Common Future'. This highlighted the need to develop economies in a way which did not deplete resources or prejudice the means of support for future generations.

A lot has been written on the subject of sustainability in relation to cities and other human settlements, in the developed and under-developed or developing worlds. Cities need to make their living without prejudicing the availability of the resources they will need themselves in future, nor depleting those of their hinterlands or the wider worlds.

That includes wild nature. It is a mistake to think of the human world and the natural world as separate. They depend on each other.

ALMA – the Angola London Mozambique Association – is a charity supported by the Diocese of London. The Diocese is also committed to promoting Fair Trade, and working through international partnerships.

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Needs, projects, partnerships

- o Water supplies
- o Sanitation, health, education
- o Seed-corn, livestock?
- o Pump-priming capital
- o Technology transfer
- o Specialist advice and support
- o E-communications
- o Climate Justice Fund
- o Eco-twinning
- o Fair trade
- o 'Extended reach'



www.tearfund.org/About+us

“In the midst of climate change, we're ... concerned with creating a sustainable environment where we can, crucial for poor people dependent on its resources.”

Tearfund

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There are many ways we in the rich North/ West, and in the Christian Church, can forge partnerships to lessen the suffering in the Third World/ Global South.

Water and sanitation and health are closely linked, all three are essential to improved welfare – as is education. Which is better, money aid or enabling and empowerment? These are questions picked up by debates around the relative benefits of capacity building in agriculture, compared to direct food aid (both may be needed, together and separately).

Western finance is needed for capital projects in many regions. The C of E/ Tearfund Climate Justice Fund is a very good way of contributing. Our contributions are by no means a gift of course – not patronage, not even generosity – the best we can do is make some partial recompense for the harm we've done.

And this does not go far enough. Developing countries are arguing the need for developed nations to pass on new technologies in the fight against climate change, free of charge – if the developing world is to feel any obligation to follow suit and cut the carbon. Technology transfer will also have to be accompanied by specialist advice and support – how much and for how long?

As much as possible should be done by electronic communications, not by going there. Better to deliver the means to establish new technologies with locally available raw materials wherever feasible, rather than shipping (or flying) the personnel and material wholesale.

These are all elements in a broad conception of fair trade, as well as 'extended reach'. This is a concept in carbon management meaning that we may not only reduce our own impact, but exert an influence on others, enabling and encouraging them to do the same.

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Sustainability v economic growth

- o Causes of and need for growth
 - Demand, competition, novelty
 - Population, prosperity
 - Politics and economics
- o Resources consumption
- o Defining 'growth'
- o Extending the balance sheet
 - Reclamation and re-use
 - Intangible assets



<http://noordinaryfool.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/green-shoots.jpg>

- o Green economic stimulus/ recovery packages
 - China, the USA, the rest
 - Aspiration v performance
- o Gross National Happiness?
 - Anti-reification
 - Non-quantifiable values
 - 'Tina' and 'Themba'
 - The necessity of hope

“Consider the lilies of the field.”

Matthew 6:28

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In recent months, a chorus of well-informed voices has been questioning the assumption that economic growth is inevitable and necessary, and we must return to it as soon as possible. Growth as an end in itself, unrestrained, unlinked to the preservation of natural capital, may well be positively dangerous, perhaps fatal to civilisation! Yet the reasons growth has come to be seen as necessary are real. It has aptly been said that “Growth is unsustainable, contraction is unstable” *.

‘Fiscal stimulus’ packages which include a sufficient proportion of investment in ‘green’ technologies – may prove more sustainable than applying sticking plaster to dying dinosaurs. China and Obama’s America have done more in the right direction than others (they’re still doing things in the wrong direction too). The UK has given a big lead in some ways. But aspiration does not guarantee performance.

Growth of money supply, growth in property prices, growth in the income of ‘fat cats’, without any real connection to an increase in value or overall goods; or, any growth whilst natural resources are being irreversibly eroded; is dangerous nonsense, doomed to implode – as the credit crunch has shown. We must learn to value those natural resources, conserve them, recognise the benefits they confer on us. If we labour for cultural and spiritual goods – whilst meeting our core needs of food and shelter economically and sustainably – then we just might be on the path to a secure future.

A few years ago, ‘post-modern’ philosophers coined the term ‘reification’ – the tendency to reduce people, qualities and values to mere ‘things’ – observable, tangible, enumerable – stripped of their essence and true worth. We must not reduce happiness to £ signs. The Archbishop of Canterbury has remarked on the contrast between ‘Tina’ (“There is no alternative”) and ‘themba’ – a Zulu word meaning something like ‘necessary hope’.

* Prof Tim Jackson, ‘Prosperity without Growth’

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ Why should Christians care?

- o A foundational mandate
 - Genesis Ch 1
 - Care and stewardship, not exploitation
- o A Gospel imperative
 - Colossians Ch 1
 - Allegiance to Christ:
“All things ... made by Him and through Him”
- o A redemptive project
 - Reclaiming ‘life in all its fullness’

“We only have one planet – already under strain and we are living on the capital which we should be passing intact to our children.”



www.himalayaguides.com/rising.jpg

The Bishop of London

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Environmental concern is ‘core business’ for Christians. It is not a luxury, nor a trendy fad – but an essential complement to preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us not be ‘so heavenly-minded, we’re no earthly use’!

We have a mandate to care for creation, and even to exercise a kind of rulership. This may not be ‘dominion’ – certainly not total dominion, which belongs to God. This is spoken of in the first book of the Bible. But Genesis was not necessarily the first biblical book to be written and read. Jewish people during Old Testament times would have been familiar with the rest of the Law, and as time went on with the Psalms and the Prophets. They would have known that selfish exploitation was ruled out. And so should we. All the great religions agree on this.

These imperatives are reinforced by the New Testament. There is a growing emphasis in the Christology of the Gospels, on ‘Jesus and the Earth’. In Colossians, St Paul proclaims Christ’s creative, purposive and sustaining roles in creation. Our responsibility to exercise stewardship is rooted in our allegiance to Christ, and dependence upon Him.

Moreover, Christ is the only being with both a complete understanding of creation (it was made through Him in His capacity as the eternal Word, and He continues to observe and sustain it from without); and an affective experience of the world, from within (having lived for a little time as a man). He can understand our condition, and he can also feel it.

At this time of looming crisis for the earth and all its creatures, we are called to participate in Christ’s redemptive work, to reclaim nature from its ‘bondage to decay’. We proclaim ‘life in all its fullness’. We are not prepared to consign the earth to a crippled life or semi-death. The ‘New Heaven and Earth’ will be redeemed versions of those we dwell in now. Maybe our present mission is to build a bridge to a transformed nature in our outer environment, as much as in our inner hearts.

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

❖ “No man is an island”

“No man is an island entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less,
as well as if a promontory were,
as well as any manner of thy friends
or of thine own were;
any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.

**And therefore never send to know
for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”**

John Donne



www.timesonline.co.uk/multimedia/archive/00188/island385_188469a.jpg

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In conclusion, here is the famous homily from the writer and divine John Donne.

Donne was a London man – and a man of the world. This quote is associated with his time in Lincoln’s Inn, the legal precinct between Holborn and the Strand.

What applies to our relations with humanity as a whole may be extended to the environment – animal and plant life, the biosphere and creation as a whole.

We are an integral part of all of these, and should care when any creature suffers or dies.

Even though all of us must die one day, let us leave a planet fit for others to live in after us.

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September 2009

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