

BAPTISTS

Summer 2018

TOGETHER

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Creator God

Awe and Wonder: Justice and Care

News Interviews Prayer Comment Events
The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain

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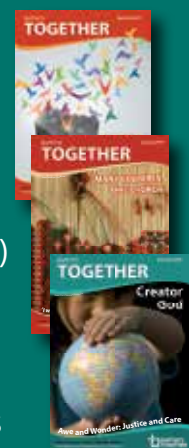
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Creator God - awe and wonder: justice and care

Have you ever gazed at a cloudless night sky and found yourself contemplating the vastness of the universe?

And then have you considered that the one who shapes and sustains this enormous cosmos wants to shape and sustain you? The one who put the stars in the sky also placed the hairs on your head and longs to communicate with you?

That's the nature of God – creator *and* redeemer.

But we are becoming aware that all is not well with how we treat creation. Images of plastic in our oceans are evidence of the throwaway society we have become. There is a scientific consensus that human activity is warming our planet – with potentially dire consequences.

As Christians, any true seeing of God will stir us to action. That's why this edition of *Baptists Together* magazine connects the wonder of creation with a strong creation care theme. God's first purpose for humans was that we should care for the earth and its creatures. The growing impact of rising temperatures on the world's poorest can seem impossible to dent with individual actions, but this is still our God-given task. As you read the following pages you might be surprised how much God's people are doing, and how much you can do that will bless your church and community in the process. There's much good news here.

The better news is the one who created and redeems everything is willing us on, too.

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“This is a discipleship issue”

General Secretary Lynn Green

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BBC TV's recent series *Blue Planet* has done much to raise awareness of environmental issues against the backdrop of those who are intent on publicly denying what the environmentalists are saying! These are not topics that are easy to engage with. We too are tempted to be in denial as the UK is not affected by climate change as much as many others around the world. It is also such a huge issue and involves both the complex inter-relationships of the natural world, and the operations of global business and politics. What can we do? What difference can we make?

As those who will reap the consequences of the actions of others in the developed world over the last century, young adults are much more aware of environmental issues and are passionate about change. Louise Brent, who is a Geography student at the University of Southampton sees it like this:



“My curiosity in understanding how the Earth supports life and how humans interact with the Earth has led myself, amongst other young adults, to discuss the current and potential future impacts of human activity on the environment.”

“It is no surprise that young adults are concerned about the declining state of the environment because our generation grew up with the threat of dangerous environmental change and so we carry the burden of making important decisions regarding the future of our environment.”

“Increasingly, individuals are beginning to understand their vital role in preserving the environment for future generations and are changing their consumption habits to reduce their environmental impact. Actions such as recycling, refusing one-use plastic, reducing meat intake, purchasing local goods and riding bicycles are simple, yet effective, ways of reducing an individual's environmental impact.”

John Weaver's article (page 8) clearly articulates the biblical mandate for creation care. In the light of that, I asked Louise what she would want to say to churches...

“I think there is a great opportunity for church groups to care for the Earth, engage with the community and share the message of creation care. Fun and affordable local sustainable community activities, such as running Repair Cafés and allotment planting, encourage individuals of all ages to reconnect with the Earth and consider how our lifestyles impact the environment, positively and negatively.”

I am part of a generation that has tended to take things for granted. I am challenged by Louise and her peers to take my God-given mandate to steward the Earth and care for it more seriously. This isn't just an environmental issue, this is a discipleship issue. Yes, we are seeing businesses and politicians beginning to make changes for a sustainable future, but that alone is not going to be sufficient. It is people like you and me who have the power to preserve the environment and everyone needs to play their part. The wonderful thing is that as we share God's heart in caring for creation we also find ourselves drawn into community and this, surely, reflects God's Kingdom beautifully.

Lynn Green is
General Secretary
of our Baptist Union



A biblical case for creation care



Photo: Billion Photos | shutterstock.com

If God will ultimately bring about the redemption of creation, do Christians have a role in caring for it? Yes we have, and here's why.

By John Weaver

Our climate is changing - the results of global warming are seen around the world. On a trip to the storm-ravaged Caribbean in October 2017, UN Secretary General António Guterres urged the world to implement the 2015 Paris Accord on climate change. He said that the world has the tools, the technologies and the wealth to address climate change, but we must show more determination in moving towards a green, clean, sustainable energy future.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), Pope Francis recognised inequality and injustice, where world leaders fail to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. He challenged those economic powers that continue to justify the current global system, where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to consider the effects on human dignity and the natural environment.

Does Christianity support our concern about climate change?

Do the creation texts in Genesis 1-3 help us? Here we learn of God's very good creation, human relationship with the environment, and about human rebellion. Genesis 2 lays out God's design for human relationships: with God, with each other and with creation, and after the 'Fall' we see that each of these relationships is broken by human self-centredness and desire for power and control. Do we see climate change disaster foretold here (Genesis 3:17-19)? Yet God's purposes are maintained through the covenant with Noah (Genesis 8:22-9:17).

God created and entrusted the earth to us

God commanded Noah to conserve nature (6:19), and after the flood God establishes his covenant with all of creation (9:8-14). God's saving of creation is seen in God's heart, as he remembers Noah. The land is still to be fertile, but the new covenant after the flood reminds us that we are always looking from the side of a broken creation, which will finally be redeemed in Christ.

What did the people of the Old Covenant think?

Temple worship proclaims God as the good Creator and who is worthy of our praise (Psalm 24:1-2; Psalm 104:2-5, 24, 31-35; Psalm 148:1-6). But more than this, God's creation itself is a witness to God's love and purposes, and as such should be valued (Psalm 19:1-4). There is more to be discovered in the Old Testament understanding of God and creation - Jesus declared at the beginning of his ministry that the words of the Law and the Prophets should always be listened to (Matthew 5:17-18).

Paul also challenges us to see our Christian calling as the care of creation

What do we find in the law and the prophets?

In Leviticus 25:1-13 we find the laws of Sabbath and Jubilee, which give three principles for farming and food production:

- » sharing – with the poor;
- » caring – for the earth;
- » and restraint – of power and wealth.

We might suggest that we take a sabbath rest in the extraction of fossil fuels, and recognise a growing industrialisation of agriculture, which is destroying the environment. Instead of keeping the Sabbath we have a Sabbath-less society.

In Leviticus 19:9-16 we find the law of gleaning. This is an important principle for the ways in which we use and share creation's gifts. The Jews of the Old Testament were not to harvest to the edges of their fields, but leave a residue for the poor to collect. We might ask whether or not this is a pattern for business owners to follow today in our attitude toward the poor and the refugee, the workers on the minimum wage, and those with physical disabilities.

Together the Mosaic laws of gleaning, releasing, tithing and Jubilee present the biblical attitude toward wealth and possessions and make up part of the Old Covenant, the keeping of which was called for by the Prophets. We see that the degradation of creation and the destruction of human lives is a result of not keeping the covenant – breaking our relationship with God, with each other and with creation (Isaiah 24:1, 4-6).

Do we find further insight through the New Covenant in Christ?

Jesus certainly reaffirms God's ordered and good creation in his agricultural parables about seed and growth, planting and harvest, but is there more to be found?

The Gospel affirms that Jesus is co-creator (John 1:1-4), that God's love and redemption is for the whole of creation (John 3:16-19), that Jesus summed up the law in terms of our relationships with God, people and creation (Matthew 22:36-40), and that he calls us to turn from self-centredness to a life of cross-shaped love, following as his disciples (Mark 8:34).

Paul states that the created order reveals the nature of God (Romans 1:20), and presents a vision of all creation created and redeemed in Christ (Colossians 1:15-20). Paul also challenges us to see our Christian calling as the care of creation (Romans 8:18-25).

Creation groans in desperate need of redemption as it waits for human beings to recover their Christ-like humanity. We look for the restoring of God's image in human beings and in the whole of creation, through restored relationships, justice and equality.

In the Book of Revelation John paints a picture of environmental destruction (16:2-12) as the result of human rebellion. John offers his theological assertion that systems of oppression and destruction will themselves ultimately face judgment, something which he vividly depicts in the vision of the destruction of the great whore and the great city – the world empire opposed to God, whether this is the economic and military obsessed *pax Romana* or a current *pax Americana* or *pax Britanica* (Revelation 17-18).

Is the situation hopeless?

Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you may die (cf Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26); or as today's hedonists might say: 'Fly, drive and consume for tomorrow you may die.' We recognise the need of a meaning beyond ourselves to give direction, accountability, and hope to our lives. We find this in God's purposes and promises.

Can our sinful actions thwart the purposes of God? The promise of the first covenant, with Noah, is that while human sinfulness and self-centredness will continue so will God's gracious promise 'never again' to destroy the earth. (Genesis 8:21-22)

God promises to be present with us in the realities of life (Psalm 23; Isaiah 43:1-5; Matthew 28:20), encourages us to hold on to hope in the face of uncertainty, and will ultimately bring about the redemption of creation (Revelation 21-22).

Ultimate hope is in God and is eternal, while human hope is temporal and uncertain. Christians are called to a hopeful discipleship in the light of our ultimate hope in God's promises and purposes. We live as those who are created in the image of God and are called to cooperate with God's transformative action in and for the world.

Christians have a contribution to make. God created and entrusted the earth to us, and will redeem the whole of creation. There are the first fruits of the Spirit, but still creation groans as it waits for God's human creatures to reach their perfect humanity (Romans 8:18-23).

Paul places the redemption of human beings in the context of the redemption of the whole creation (cf John 3:16), and creation is brought back into relationship with God through the cross (Colossians 1:15-20). This takes place as human beings live out their restored relationship with the Creator, through the cross; living as hopeful disciples.

John Weaver is the Chair of the John Ray Initiative: connecting environment, science and Christianity. He was President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain 2008-9.



What difference can I make?

Creation care can seem overwhelming. Izzy Sibley recounts how she progressed from being concerned for God's creation to concerted environmental action – and the impact on her Baptist church

When it comes to talking about the 'green issue' quite often you receive one of two responses. The first is a positive, "I'm going to take this on board and try to make a change". The second, and, most common response is, "this issue is huge and I am just one individual. What difference can I make?"

This was also my initial response. So what changed?

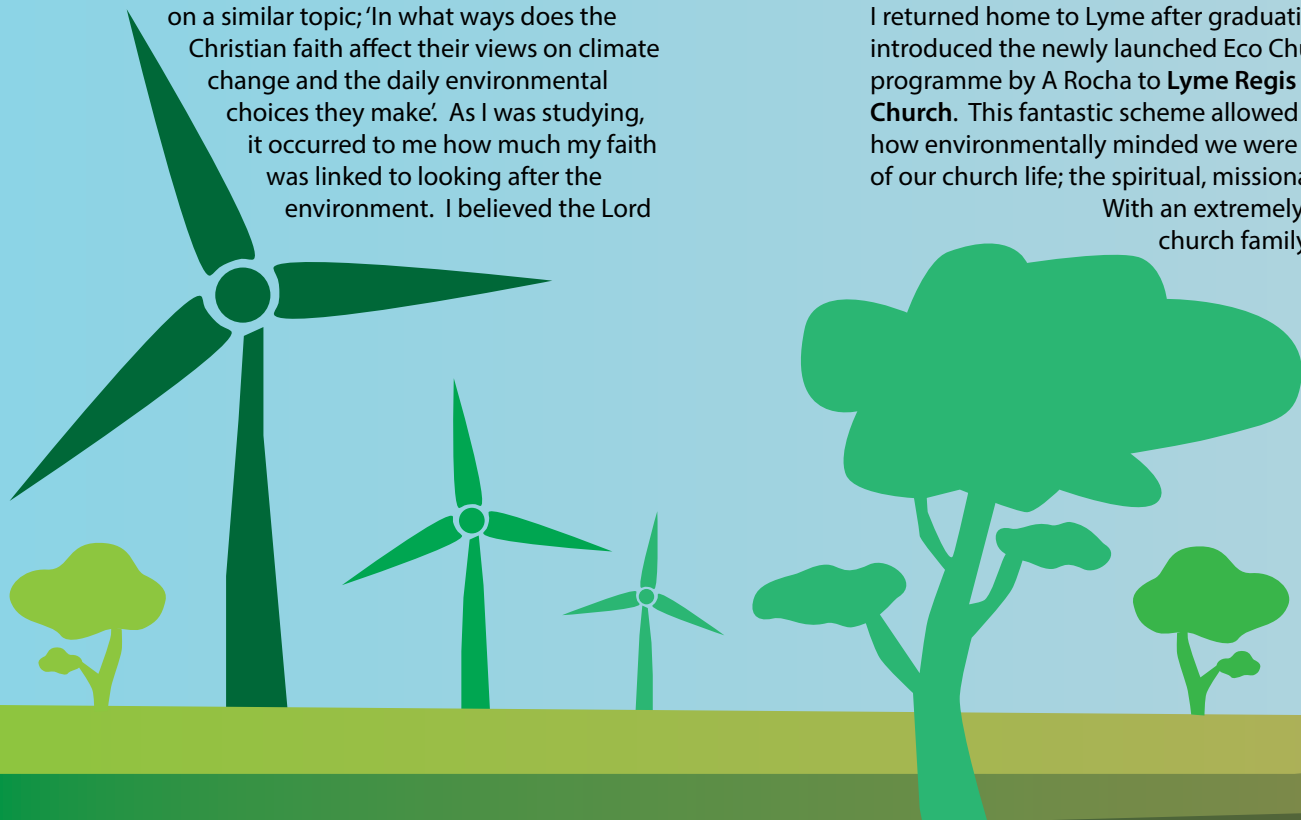
My journey very much began in my final year of university where I studied Geography but specialised in Climate Change and Society. During this time not only did I learn the devastating facts about the current state of our planet, but I also studied the public's response to it; the psychology behind why people may choose to react or not react when hearing about the critical situation our climate is in. This then inspired me to write my undergraduate dissertation on a similar topic; 'In what ways does the Christian faith affect their views on climate change and the daily environmental choices they make'. As I was studying, it occurred to me how much my faith was linked to looking after the environment. I believed the Lord

created the planet and gave it to us to steward and shepherd and yet, despite growing up in a Christian home and attending church my whole life, it was not something I had ever heard being preached about or discussed in the Christian community.

So, as I began to interview people, hand out questionnaires and hold focus groups with members of the local churches around my home town, Lyme Regis, I was able to build up a picture and see if my experience was unique. Sadly, I discovered, it was not. The general result was, yes, participants believed it was important to look after the planet due to God's command in Genesis to shepherd it. However, this did not motivate them into any concerted environmental action.

Discouraged, but more determined than ever, I returned home to Lyme after graduating, and introduced the newly launched Eco Church programme by A Rocha to **Lyme Regis Baptist Church**. This fantastic scheme allowed us to examine how environmentally minded we were in three areas of our church life; the spiritual, missional and practical.

With an extremely supportive church family we set to it.



Among other things, we switched our energy provider to an eco friendly one, we swapped our cleaning products to plant-based, chemical-free brands and held clothes swaps for our local community to encourage the recycling of clothes.

However, although this practical action was good, and helped us make a lot of progress, the most important aspect for us was spiritual. It was all very well and good making these practical changes, but if Jesus (Christ-likeness) wasn't our motivation behind it, then we were just like any other secular group. So we delved into scripture during Sunday mornings and in our house groups. We really began to understand how much looking after the planet is linked to the gospel and being more like Jesus.

Colossians chapter one proclaims:

'The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.'

Here we are told that 'all things' are created through our Lord, for him and by him. So why would we not want to take care of the planet, which, according to Genesis has not only been given to us as a gift, but has been created through, by and for our saviour?

Christian environmentalist Jonathan Moo states:

"How can we in reality love God with all of our being if we do not value what he loves and values and do not care for the creation that belongs to him?"

Another piece of scripture that really was a turning point for our church family was Mark chapter 12 where we are taught by Jesus to love our neighbours. It is now clear from scientific evidence that our affluent lifestyles here in the west are negatively affecting climates across the world. With our excessive burning of fossil fuels and consumer driven society we are causing harm to those in countries that don't have the

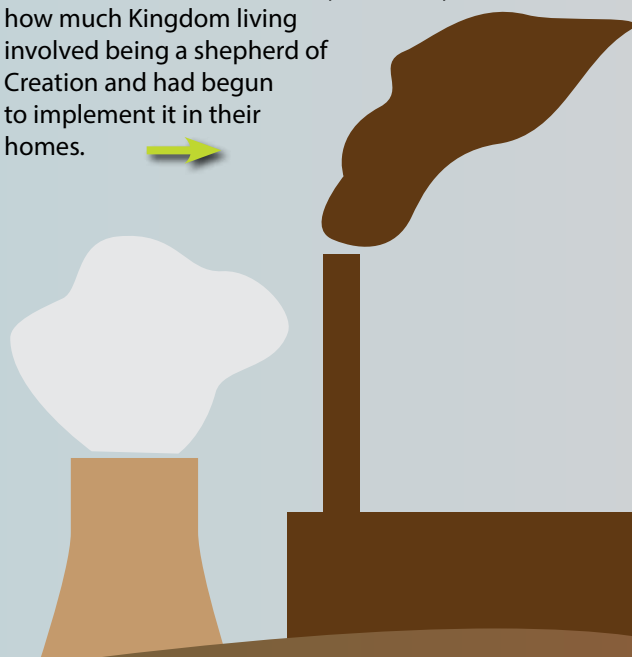
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means to mitigate or adapt. One reason we're so slow to take up environmental action in the UK is the fact we aren't feeling the initial impacts of climate change; for us it is a distant problem that isn't obviously affecting us. Nevertheless, Jan Egeland, former UN Under Secretary General for humanitarian affairs states:

"Climate change - it is happening, and today affecting those who suffer the most. You only need to visit countries like Africa to see the devastation that is already occurring through drought and flood."

Are we, as disciples of Christ, loving our neighbours as Jesus commanded, by making sure our lifestyles have no detrimental impact on our neighbours across the world? It is certainly a challenge but one we can rise to.

Two years on from writing my first dissertation I found myself writing another dissertation for the Christian Rural and Environmental Studies certificate course with the John Ray Initiative. I decided to base this study on Lyme Regis Baptist Church, asking the same questions as my first dissertation to see what progress we had made since introducing the Eco Church project. The results of this second piece were incredibly encouraging. Not only had we achieved our bronze and then silver Eco Church award, but people had really begun to link their faith to taking care of the environment. They had really understood how much Kingdom living involved being a shepherd of Creation and had begun to implement it in their homes.





Izzy with her father, Lyme Regis Baptist Church minister Chris Woodman, and church member and prominent botanist, Sir Ghilleain Prance

So, I return to the question raised at the beginning of this article; "How can we make a difference, when climate change is so huge?" Our planet is now past the point of no return. We are destroying our shorelines and seas with plastic, tearing down rainforests, and polluting our land with chemicals. Despite this, we can make a difference, and it starts with the relatively small actions individuals can take in their homes and churches.

For example, switching to green energy providers (which takes all of 20 minutes), cutting down on plastic packaging, switching light bulbs to LEDs and being conscious of food air miles. Small, simple things when done by enough people can snowball into a big change! Consider if every Baptist church in the UK became an Eco Church, what a difference that would make!

Consider if every Baptist church in the UK became an Eco Church, what a difference that would make!

Finally, one of the most vital areas of becoming more environmentally conscious as disciples of Christ is the missional opportunities it brings. It is our responsibility as Christians to take a stand against injustice and unethical practice. This is a chance to not only show our local communities that we are up to date and positively active on current issues but, what an opportunity to witness and bring people to Christ through doing it! What an opportunity to show the love of Jesus through taking care of and showing love for our planet...

'Our cautious response to these issues in the face of mounting evidence may be seen by the world as uncaring, reckless and ill informed. We can do better. To abandon these issues to the secular world is to shrink from our responsibility to be salt and light. The time for timidity regarding God's creation is no more.'

- Southern Baptist Declaration on the environment and climate change

Izzy Sibley works for two local churches in her area of West Dorset and East Devon, helping them in their Eco Church journey. Izzy is passionate about her faith and looking after the environment.





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“Ask the animals and they will teach you”

(Job 12:7-10)

How do the Earth’s creatures speak to us... and are we listening? By Kevin Durrant



Painting: The Scorpion, Panel from 'Christ in the Wilderness' Spencer, Stanley (1891-1959) | Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia/Bridgeman Images

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. Mark 1: 12-13

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. Genesis 2: 18-22

I wonder if this is what Jesus is doing in the painting by the English artist Stanley Spencer; asking an animal to teach him. In Mark's much abbreviated account of Jesus' time in the wilderness, there's no description of the devil's three temptations as found in Matthew and Luke. The only information we're given is that Jesus 'was with the wild animals, and angels attended him'.

However, looking at Spencer's portrayal of Jesus sitting with a scorpion, one can imagine a variation on the temptation to turn stones into bread: 'Turn this hostile animal into something more friendly!' The devil might then go on to say:

'If you are the son of God, throw your foot down on this scorpion. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you and they will lift you up in their hands, so that your foot will not get stung.'

And yet, according to Mark, the angels weren't there to rescue Jesus from the wild animals but rather to attend to his needs, in their presence. So maybe Spencer is right to show Jesus resisting the temptation to destroy the scorpion and treating it instead, even with raised sting, as a companion rather than a threat. Jesus' bare feet and open hands suggest a man very much in touch with creation; while the way his clothing and skin merge with the surrounding landscape and sky makes him look at home in the natural world. But, the painting gives Jesus a sad face, and I wonder whether this reflects a loneliness which, though eased a bit by the companionship of the animals, was still awaiting the arrival of the ministering angels. Such a thought resonates with the passage from Genesis 2.

Here, in a kind of *Earth's Got Talent* show, Adam sits Simon-Cowell-like as each newly created animal and bird demonstrates its abilities before him. He then names them; a procedure which, in Bible times, reflected not just his authority, but the unique qualities he saw within each one. It was the beginning of scientific investigation; Adam was learning about ecosystems. But the animals weren't brought just to be named but also to see if any could act as a suitable companion. It's possible that this 'audition' serves only as a story-telling device designed

to raise expectations for the coming climax – the creation of woman. And yet, for God to present each animal as a possible helper implies they must have had something valuable to offer. Adam's loneliness in the Garden, like that of Jesus in the desert, may have needed the arrival of an 'angelic' woman before it could be fully alleviated, but this didn't mean the presence of the other creatures wasn't appreciated (just ask any dog or cat lover!).

'...because God's goodness could not be adequately represented by any single creature, God produced many and diverse creatures, that what one lacked in representing the divine goodness might be supplied in another... Thus the whole universe together displays the divine goodness more perfectly.'
Thomas Aquinas

Animals do offer us a degree of companionship – even wild ones. In a 2017 BBC documentary on the last surviving male northern white Rhino, Sudan, his keeper was asked how he'd feel when the 42 year old beast died and he replied "lonely."

Animals also serve to enhance our sense of wonder and worship. Thomas Aquinas wrote:

'...because God's goodness could not be adequately represented by any single creature, God produced many and diverse creatures, that what one lacked in representing the divine goodness might be supplied in another... Thus the whole universe together displays the divine goodness more perfectly.'

Hence the Bible's use of a descending dove, a roaring lion and a wounded lamb to express divine attributes. God's creation increases our vocabulary for worshipping the Creator.

Animals and birds can also act as divine messengers. Examples from the Bible include Balaam's donkey ('you are heading for destruction'), the birds of the air ('you're worrying too much'), and the ants ('don't be so lazy'). They still speak to us today, often through their suffering and extinction. Like the canaries that once warned miners of dangerous gas, we now have dead seabirds with stomachs full of plastic warning us of polluted oceans, and the decline within many animal species testifying to our ecological vandalism. In place of a donkey being battered by a money-grabbing prophet, we recently had a lion (Cecil) being shot by a trophy-hunting dentist. Will we, like Balaam, listen to such voices before it's too late?

The greatest lesson the earth's creatures teach us is humility. God's final speech to Job is a three-chapters-long description of the wonders of the Earth and its creatures, in which the title of 'first among the works of God' is given not to a human but to a behemoth – probably a hippopotamus or elephant! (40:19). God seems to be challenging our understanding of what it means to 'have dominion' over the animals (Genesis 1:28).

I've never had a close encounter with a scorpion, but I did recently come face to face with a hedgehog on my front drive. I couldn't remember the last time I'd seen one (numbers in the UK have fallen from 30 million in the 1950s to less than 1 million today). The experience was sobering, seeing the animal marooned on tarmac; but it was also spiritual, because I realised how much I'd missed their company. We were fellow travelers on one orbiting planet and joint recipients of God's grace.

As Job suggested, I asked the hedgehog and it taught me that, 'in [God's] hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all humankind.' (12:7-10)

Kevin Durrant is the author of *The Earth Will Teach You*, a series of reflections in which he helps us to discern the voice of nature and the testimony of Scripture as they relate to the world around us and our responsibilities to it.

Kevin is the minister of **Keynsham Baptist Church, Bristol**



Life without a car

By Ruth Whiter

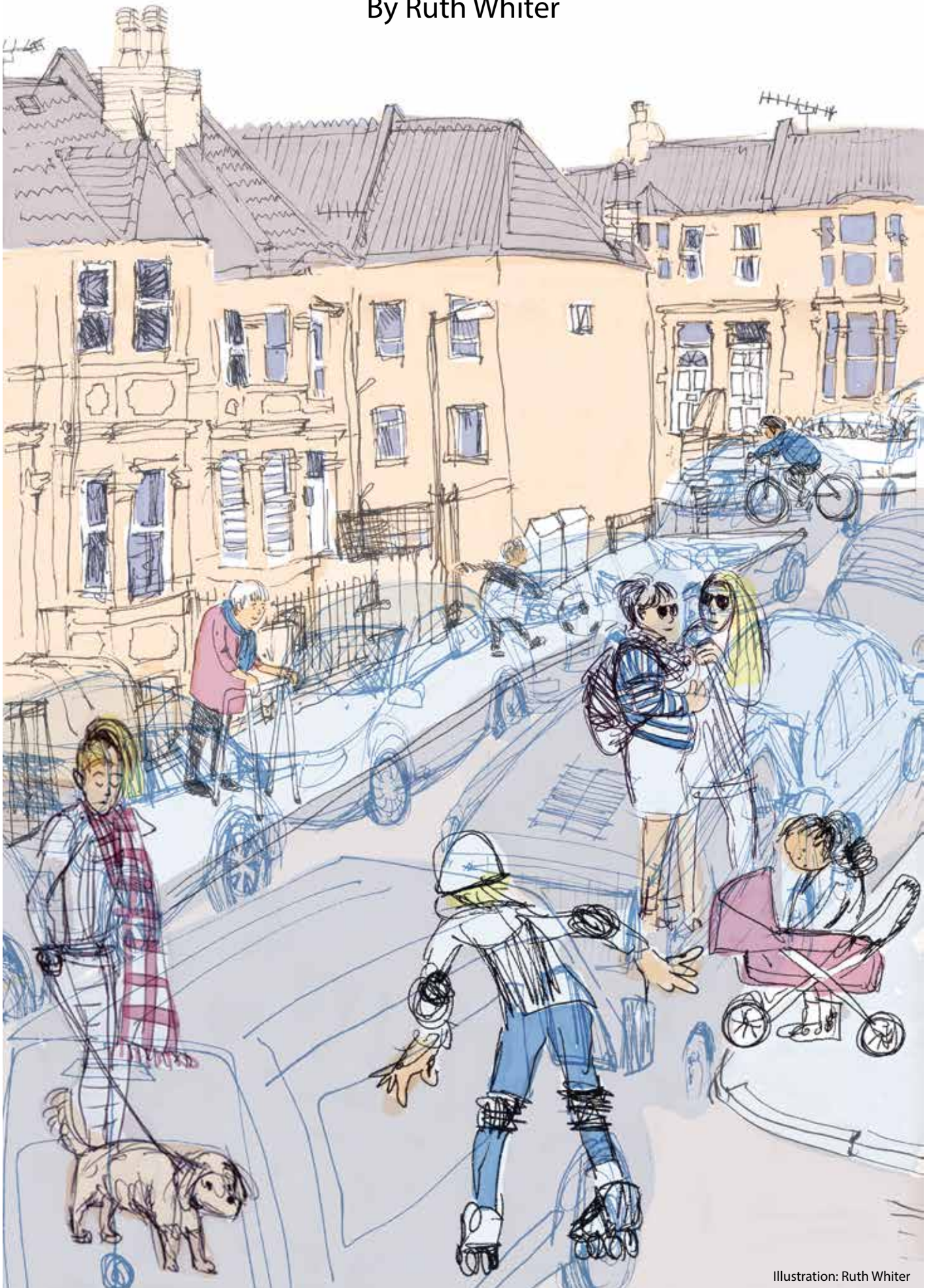


Illustration: Ruth Whiter

I consider myself fortunate. I don't like driving. I married someone who likes it less. As newlyweds we were given an old yellow mini; it sat on the drive and after the battery had gone flat twice we had it taken away for scrap. From the beginning, we planned our accommodation, our jobs, our church, and our shopping around bicycles and public transport. We settled in a city, within walking distance of a mainline station. When we had small children, we joined a car club, thinking it might be useful when they needed ferrying to evening activities later. We were right, but we never needed to use it more than two or three times a month. We have now brought up two young adults without owning a car.

Our reasons for doing this were never entirely about creation care. But I'm sure we are all aware of the harm private vehicles do to the environment. They burn fossil fuels and contribute to climate change – even the electric ones, unless we move to entirely renewable electricity. Pollution contributes to around 40,000 deaths a year in the UK¹, and in those areas where air pollution exceeds legal limits, 80 per cent of nitrogen oxide comes from road traffic.² Congestion in our towns and cities contributes to stress, anger, reduced productivity, wasted time and noise pollution.

I am very aware that your circumstances may be different from mine. You have a job that specified 'must have own car'. Walking to the station would take too long and parking there is expensive, before you even contemplate buying tickets. You give lifts and are available to those in need. Driving is part of the way you serve God. And, let's face it, I'll probably gladly accept your lift next time you offer.

Nevertheless, I'd like to share with you a few misconceptions about the car free life which I hear again and again. These are simply my observations. They will be biased, because we all like to defend our chosen lifestyle. But if you get defensive too, as you read them, you could use this opportunity to let God search your heart, and your attachment to that metal box in the drive.

1 You'd need a car to get there...

Occasionally, this is true. But I have lost count of the times when it wasn't. It crops up especially when people recommend days out for the family. Occasionally, you can get there *more* quickly and easily by train, bike, or even by bus, especially in city centres. Most often, you can get there but it will take longer. The train, bus, or bike ride will be part of the fun of your day out, rather than what you do before it begins. Google maps will give you a quick comparison of driving, walking, cycling, and public transport to any destination.

2 You'd need a car to carry that...

You know, I'm not particularly strong. I can't do one proper press-up. But I carry most of the food shopping for a teenage family in roll-top panniers on the back of my bike. I can't get up the hill without getting off, but pushing a bike laden with panniers is easier than carrying the smallest carrier bag at the end of your arm, because the wheels take the weight. When I put the same Saturday shop in a VW Polo, the boot looks fairly full. What I'm saying is, having a car *can* give you a false sense of what it's possible to carry.

3 The trains are always late

I do know how frustrating train travel can be. But the government's figures on trains which arrive on time (between 81 per cent and 96 per cent, depending on the company)³ matches my experience. If I were to make an estimate of the number of people who have arrived on time by car to the meetings I have been in over the last five years, I doubt it would hit that lower figure. Is it possible that our perception of 45 minutes late on a train is very different from our perception of 45 minutes late in a car? In a traffic jam, I feel claustrophobic and frustrated, while someone else might welcome the chance to catch up on last week's sermon. Other people feel claustrophobic and frustrated in a stopped train carriage, while I welcome the chance to... catch up on last week's sermon. Late is late, that's all I'm saying.



Well, I've had my rant. Maybe you're irritated, or maybe you are thinking about leaving the car at home for one or two journeys this week. I've been reading Isaiah, and he seems to follow God's 'rants' with beautiful pictures of what life on God's terms could be like. Can you imagine a United Kingdom where car journeys are only made where no practical alternative can be chosen, designed, or developed?

- » Rich and poor alike need public transport, so improvements and subsidies are a vote winner, bringing greater equality of opportunity for jobs and education.
- » Those who have no alternative – the elderly and people with disabilities, and those visiting towns and cities from rural areas, alongside care workers and emergency plumbers, can drive freely into our cities and park outside the building they're visiting.
- » Childhood asthma and obesity begin to sound like diseases of the past as the air becomes cleaner and walking and cycling become safer and more normal.
- » Children begin to take ownership of our residential streets again. Yes, the occasional vehicle will be turning into the street, but let's hope it will have sensors that know the children are playing there. With less incentive to zip across town to entertain the children, neighbours find themselves more often in shared space, with all the missional opportunity that brings.

Live sketcher and
illustrator **Ruth Whiter** is
communications
co-ordinator for the
West of England Baptist
Association



1 Royal College of Physicians 2016

2 *The role of walking and cycling in solving the UK's air quality crisis*, © Sustrans December 2017

3 Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proportion-of-trains-running-on-time>



CHURCH STORIES

A small collection of stories showing how Baptists are involved in creation care



“Flinging the doors open onto God’s garden”

How Fleet Meadow Baptist Church is growing relationships through its allotment

Where is God already active in the community - and how can we join in?

That’s what members of Fleet Meadow Baptist Church in Didcot were asking when minister Ann Fradgley joined four years ago. The church has a heart for the community, but with a small membership it had to be realistic about its resources.

It meets in a hall adjacent to an allotment. For a number of years members would serve refreshments to the plot holders – and their prayers and discernment began to focus here. “I really felt God saying he wanted us to have a plot,” Ann says, “and that he would prepare the ground.”

After initially being told there was a two year waiting list, they were offered two plots. One had a central location. It felt confirmation of God’s call.

That was in 2014, and initially there was suspicion among the other plot holders, with some wondering how long they would last. Ann says the church has taken a relationship-building approach. “We needed to be sensitive to the culture. We didn’t want to alienate, but to bless and be part of the community there.”

One Sunday a month the church hosts an informal service there, involving a thought for the day-style slot. Everyone is invited, and they always serve a selection of refreshments (“food is such an ice breaker,” says Ann). They have discovered that hosting brunch barbecues is a hit – people can stop for a bacon butty before getting back to work. They rely on their neighbours for advice about all aspects of running an allotment, and have found people keen to help. A core group from the church looks after what they grow, with other members on hand to serve refreshments and carry out general tasks. They aim to give a lot of produce away to people in need.

With such sensitive input, relationships have started to grow.

“Over time people have come to realise we are serious,” says Ann. “It took 18

months, but there was definitely a change. They know we are Christians, and we have been accepted there. They’ve told us they’ve sat and listened to the service. People on the estate who wouldn’t previously speak to me now do, and that’s because of the allotment.”

She adds the allotment has helped the church grow as a community. It’s also made them much more aware of the environment – and how God is connecting with people through creation.

“So many people don’t believe in God, but are experiencing God’s creative spirit through creation. Some are so in touch with nature, they have to be experiencing God. They would not set foot in a church building, would never engage with God through the written word or a sermon, but they are engaging through creation.

“So we are out there, helping and loving and praying – but we feel really blessed to have it. Our allotment is a sacred space – entering it is like flinging the doors open onto God’s garden.

“We really feel that God is in this.”



Photos: Fleet Meadow Baptist Church

“An ongoing journey of gradual change”

The eco journey at Norwich Central Baptist Church

A deeper understanding of justice, a desire to make ethical choices across all areas of life, and more missional opportunities: the path towards being an eco-friendly church has resulted in more than simply greener practices for one congregation in Norfolk.

In 2015 Norwich Central Baptist Church (NCBC) became the last ever to receive the Eco Congregation award, the precursor to Christian charity A Rocha's Eco Church scheme. To qualify, the church had to demonstrate it cared seriously for the earth and ensured church life and activities had a positive impact on the environment.

The idea was first pitched to the leadership team by member Kirstin Aitken. “I’ve always been interested in sustainability, and came across the eco congregation scheme through links with Scottish congregations,” she explained.

“I knew that faith and caring for the environment were connected, that creation care was part of our worship. I thought it would be a good thing for the church to do.”

The church carried out an ‘eco-audit’ to identify priorities for improvement. It drew up an action plan which included



Photo: Norwich Central Baptist Church

many aspects of church life, including the management of their buildings, travel to church, sourcing ethical suppliers and the recycling of food waste.

A sermon series played a key role in building the support of the congregation. Other key points included a visit from a BMS Mission worker from Uganda, who spoke very clearly about the impact of climate change and on farming in the country. Recycling facilities were placed in every room of the church building; the congregation took part in a climate change campaign, focused on how it could steward its resources better, and held prayer meetings about the environment.

A number of goals were achieved and progress was made in other areas. Awarding body A Rocha praised NCBC for the way so many groups within the church were represented on the eco

team, and the overall support of the church. Baptist minister John Weaver, a contributor to this magazine, was on hand to present the award plaque, which had been fashioned from recycled church pews.

The eco congregation award spans three years, and now the congregation is aiming for a silver ‘Eco Church’ award later this year. To achieve this it needs to think about its own carbon footprint, and encourage sustainability in people’s lifestyles. Pastor Mark Fairweather-Tall says it’s been an ongoing journey of gradual change, with a number of wider benefits, and hopefully more to come. “We didn’t see a sea-change straight away,” he says. “Understanding how it’s relevant and how people can take part took time.

“But we have seen a culture change. People realise more and more the ethical choices they can make – such as bank accounts – and how they can make a difference. They want to know more about the impact of their lifestyles. One of the big revelations for me was the links between climate change and justice. Our understanding of faith, creation care and matters of justice are all linked together.”

There’s also been a missional dimension. NCBC is a city centre church, with a number of outside users throughout the week. Mark has been able to explain to the building’s users, particularly those interested in protecting the environment, more of the church’s activities and how it all links with the Christian faith. “It’s enabled me to have a number of unexpected conversations.”



The Eco Congregation team, with Kirstin, centre, holding the plaque and John Weaver fourth from right. NCBC’s minister Mark Fairweather-Tall is third from left.

Photo: Network Norfolk



The Driftwood

Lyme Regis Baptist Church

The Driftwood is a new café at Lyme Regis Baptist Church: fashioned from many recycled materials, it's a place to explore life's deeper questions – and where the love of God is manifest

"What a beautiful, peaceful space The Driftwood is! It has an air of calm serenity, undoubtedly enhanced by all the reclaimed wood that has been used to create it – quite the perfect place for a convivial community event!"

This recent Facebook review is music to the ears of the congregation at Lyme Regis Baptist Church. In early 2016 the congregation embarked on a project to renovate a well-used but dated hall.

Driven by one of its younger members, 25-year-old Megan Woodman, the aim was to create a resource for the church and the wider community: a space to connect and explore life's deeper questions; a place where the love of God and good news of the Gospel is manifest; all in a contemporary setting that would



both reflect something of the character of the West Dorset coastal town and the congregation's faith-informed commitment to creation care.

The result is The Driftwood, a visually stunning venue captured by the five-star Facebook review quoted above. As befits a part of the country that attracts its fair share of surfers, wood is a strong feature. All of it is recycled, with former factory beams and reclaimed scaffolding boards finding new life there. In a neat link to a previous generation of church members, the Driftwood team even discovered that the panels used to line the walls of the former small hall had themselves been recycled and began life as box pews. These wall panels remain as part of the new space.

"It's a strong link to our past – our Victorian predecessors were already recycling before recycling became popular," says Megan. And it also made us wonder: how much prayer and worship have come from these pews?"

Indeed, the link to the past is both physical and spiritual, with the story of The Driftwood steeped in prayer and responding to God's call.

During the last few weeks of her Applied Theology and Children's and Schools degree at Moorlands Bible College, Megan prayed: "Lord, where do you want me to go?"

A placement at a Christian café and skate park in Wimborne impressed on her the effectiveness of reaching young people in a café setting. Then during an entirely random visit to a skate park in Poole, a piece of graffiti stopped her in her tracks. Scrawled on one of the skate board ramps was the question: "What if God doesn't care?"

"I just thought 'wow'. I knew it was God saying 'Meg, there are people out there with really big questions.'" She sensed she was being called to create a space where such questions could be addressed and discussed – and vowed to go wherever God called her.

She returned to Lyme Regis Baptist Church, which is pastored by her father, and began to wonder – could the small hall be converted into a café? It was a well-used, but dated-looking space. She shared what was on her heart with the congregation, and the response was an immediate 'yes' – provided Megan led the project. She had initially discounted returning home to Lyme Regis, but now here she was – leading the church into the unknown.

It was a huge step of faith. There were no young people in the congregation, but plenty in the town. Megan prayed that God would bring the right people onto the team, and that there would be enough financial backing.

Doors started to open. An architect and a site manager from the local community were attracted to the project, and both offered their services for free. A little later a carpenter offered his services free of charge to create the tables.



Photo: Lyme Regis Baptist Church



Photo: Lyme Regis Baptist Church

The original small hall

“There were so many miracles along the way,” Megan says. “Amazing people from both within the church and outside of it volunteered to be on the team.

“And right from the start money has just come in. We thought it would be through grants and trusts, but 80 per cent has been from the congregation, visitors and ‘friends of the church.’”

The café opened at Christmas 2017. Already a local surf club has used it (“people who have never previously set foot in the building,” notes Megan). The church has been hosting a new, twice monthly event this year called The Space, an event that aims to encourage ‘a very contemporary consideration of scripture in the light of modern

popular, scientific understanding’. There is also a new Sunday meeting called The Forge providing a more interactive alternative to the more conventional morning meeting.

At the time of writing the congregation is praying through how best to use its new space. They don’t want to rush into something and are waiting on God.

It will not open as a regular café, but be used more as an events venue, including being available for the wider community to hire. Megan is sure there is more to come. She explains that a number of people throughout the project have quite independently found themselves quoting a phrase adapted from the film ‘Field of Dreams’: ‘if you build it they will come’

The phrase has felt God-given, and with everything that’s already happened has given them the confidence that new lives will be reached.

“Through all of this I’ve been reminded of the verse: God can do immeasurably more than you can imagine,” Megan says. “It felt like we started with very

little but a dream. The way it’s come to fruition had a massive impact on my own faith, and has really empowered and encouraged the congregation too, answering a lot of their prayers over the years.”

“I wanted to create an amazing space for young people to open up these big conversations,” she continues. “I never expected it to look the way it looks. And the impact it is already having? It is bucking the stereotypical image of a church. So many people have come in and said: “What’s this doing in this building?”

“We just want to give it back to God – and use it for his glory.”



Photo: Lyme Regis Baptist Church



Photo: Lyme Regis Baptist Church

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“It’s been life-giving”

Fernhill Heath Baptist Church in Worcestershire was the first Baptist church to win a Silver Eco Church Award. Its eco journey has brought the congregation closer and helped develop links with the wider community

Fernhill’s eco-journey began in 2010. Inspired by a Bible study on creation, the church set up a Creation Care Group to develop some ideas as to how it could become more eco-friendly.

“We have a duty to care for, and not waste, the resources that the Lord has given us,” explained Martin Harris, the Moderator of the Creation Care Group.

“The first principle we adopted was that we would not ‘preach Green-ness’. It was important to bring the church with us on a journey.

“The second principle was that although creation care is a serious subject, we don’t always have to treat it too seriously.”

Calling itself The Green Team, the group decided to take a gradual, inclusive approach to becoming eco-friendlier. It applied for Fairtrade Church membership, added recycling bins in the kitchen and fitted ‘hippos’ in the toilets to help save water. It raised £300 to twin the toilets in both the church and manse with a latrine in Africa, partly fundraising through a social evening which included a toilet roll bowling competition.

The church chooses a theme each year. One was ‘Butterflies and Bees’, where people were encouraged to develop insect friendly patches in their gardens - many of which have continued to this day. Last year’s theme was reducing food waste.

One of the popular plant sales held by the church



Photo: Fernhill Baptist Church

Creation care became part of the gospel story:
the God of creation is renewing everything.
We want to be part of that gospel story.

During the year, the church holds lots of events, including a sunflower-growing competition and making Christmas decorations from recycled materials. Some of the events are educational, including a talk by the District Council recycling officer and a visit to a recycling centre. It’s always alive to opportunities to join community initiatives, such as litter picks.

There’s a green noticeboard, where people advertise items they no longer need, as well as an international dimension: Fernhill Heath has partnered a church in Uganda which works with refugees from South Sudan, and has raised funds for a sanitation project there.

“It’s just ongoing,” says Jeff Porter, the church’s first ever full time minister, who initially arrived with Home Mission support back in 2003. “It’s been fun, it’s been life-giving. We’ve laughed together, grown together. It’s helped the ethos of the church. We can all contribute something.”

It’s something within the reach of any church, says Martin. “Bring together a group of like-minded members of your fellowship who can start to drive the project forward.

“The absolute pre-requisite is getting the buy-in from your minister, deacons, and wider fellowship.

“With that, and some real enthusiasm, it can be very enjoyable and rewarding.”

And for Jeff, having a creation care focus is all part of joining what God is already doing.

He adds, “Creation care became part of the gospel story: the God of creation is renewing everything. We want to be part of that gospel story.”



Photo: Fernhill Baptist Church

Photo: BMS World Mission

Pastors at a BMS-supported training centre in Peru are taught new ways of farming for a more sustainable future.



PLANTING A BETTER FUTURE IN THE AMAZON

In the Amazon region of Peru, BMS World Mission is training pastors not only in theology, but in ways to practically care for their environment.

Creation care is important. It's important for people's livelihoods in places like Peru, and it's important to God.

"If you teach the Bible, but you don't include that human beings have a responsibility to care for their environment, I think you're missing out a chunk of the Bible," says BMS mission worker, and environmental scientist, Laura-Lee Lovering.



Laura-Lee gets the chance to inspire pastors about creation care at a BMS-supported training centre that she helps to run in Nauta, Peru. Pastors attending courses at the centre are taught theology and biblical literacy, as well as practical skills. Their education doesn't stop there however, as they're given lessons in caring for their land so that present and future generations will

benefit. One critical lesson is that of tree planting. The traditional practice in Peru is to clear land and burn what remains, and then plant just one type of tree for a few years. But there is a different way. One that is being shared with the pastors.

"The forest prefers to be more diverse," says Laura-Lee. "With a whole range of trees, some plants give a sort of fertiliser to the soil, others take more, so you get a system that is more sustainable within itself."

That sustainability is already bearing fruit. Late last year, the first cacao pods were spotted on seedlings planted in 2014, produce that will help the rural pastors, and help Laura-Lee's future teaching on the topic of 'Creation Administration'. It's lessons like these that are being taken back to

pastors' churches and multiplied in the communities along the Amazon.

"God has done such an amazing work here," says Laura-Lee. "It would be crazy to think that we could let it be destroyed without worrying about it. We need to take responsibility for looking after this place and discovering all that God has put here for us."

BMS is exploring future creation care projects in Peru. We believe BMS has a responsibility to be good stewards of God's creation, to value and respect the world, and to be advocates of sound environmental practices, whether that be in our carbon-offset travel policy, by using solar panels at our UK sites, or supporting the people Laura-Lee meets.

"As a Christian, the most central issue is about salvation," says Laura-Lee. "But creation care helps us live. We are saved, but what quality of life are we saved to? I think God cares about that."



Ideas for change

When it comes to tackling climate, all our small actions begin to add up to make a big difference. This collection of ideas is sourced from our contributors, alongside a challenge from the *Baptists Together* editorial team: before the year is out, can you commit to one of these?



A challenge for the congregation: register with Eco Church

This will encourage everyone to look at their use of energy and ways for the church to become more environmentally friendly. <https://ecochurch.arochoa.org.uk>

A challenge for individuals: write to your local councillor and your local MP

Urge them locally and nationally to work toward the reduction of CO₂ emissions and to commit to the use of renewable energy. This action engages directly with decision makers and indicates to them that their constituency members are calling them to act.

John Weaver



Switch your energy supplier

One of the biggest contributors towards environmental degradation is the burning of fossil fuels, a large amount of which are used to heat and light our homes and church buildings. One fantastic and practical way of challenging this system and helping our environment is switching our energy providers to eco friendly suppliers. Like us, you might even find it's cheaper! It takes just minutes of your time and there are lots of great companies to choose from including Ecotricity or Green Energy. It's a simple and practical way of making a real difference to this planet and a way we can collectively make change.

Ecotricity.co.uk
Greenenergyuk.com

Izzy Sibley



Change your car

We can't all afford hybrid and electric cars at the moment. But next time you are thinking of buying a fossil fuel powered vehicle, ask what the carbon dioxide emissions for it are. Think honestly about the size of car you really need, and choose one in that size range with the lowest emissions. You'll find the sales person is surprised you asked and probably does not know. Ask them to look it up and let you know. Or surprise them more by looking it up on the web and telling them, explaining that you have a concern for how we are impacting the climate through the fossil fuels we use.

In the UK, on average, each household is responsible for putting 8 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year into the atmosphere. A few years ago we traded in an old car for a smaller, more efficient one and saved around 1.5 tonnes of emissions each year – that's just under a fifth our emissions!

In weather forecasting there is a saying that has some truth behind it. If a butterfly flaps its wings over Africa, a few days later you will have a hurricane over the Caribbean. So the more of us who ask the dealers about the climate impact of the car we are thinking of buying, the more the possibility that they, the manufactures and governments, will start to listen.

Dave Gregory



Buy a railcard this year

Nearly everyone can – whether you're over 60, a family, a young person, a couple, or just have a friend you go for days out with. They all give a third off prices, even the cheaper advance tickets. That will give you the incentive to go for days out by train, and take the sting out of those ticket prices. Visit www.railcard.co.uk for details.

Ruth Whiter



Get out more!

It's one thing to know about God's creation; it's quite another to experience its sights, sounds and smells first hand. Research has shown that those who are regularly exposed to the wildness of the natural world - especially at an early age - are more likely to be active in nature conservation. Every now and then, it's good to put ourselves in places where nature overwhelms us - maybe even frightens us a little. So, instead of limiting prayer times to home and church, think about going on a prayer walk in the countryside; and instead of always taking the kids to a concrete shopping centre, take them to some scary woods and set them and their imaginations loose!

Kevin Durrant

Ideas from Nicky Bull, chair of Operation Noah and member of High Street Baptist Church, Tring

- » **Switch your energy supplier to one that offers 100% renewable electricity.** This is one of the biggest things you and your church can do to reduce your carbon footprint. Going through the Big Church Switch scheme will make it easier: www.bigchurchswitch.org.uk (NB This scheme can be used by individual householders as well as by churches.)
- » **Make a commitment to divest from (or not to invest in) fossil fuels.** This will raise awareness of the damage being done by the oil industry, and support the campaign for national churches to divest from fossil fuels. Operation Noah has produced a step-by-step guide to help you do this. brightnow.org.uk/divest-your-church
- » **Make a donation to smaller Christian charities** such as Operation Noah, Green Christian, A Rocha or Christian Concern for One World – perhaps through a church collection at a 'green' service. It will make a big difference to them.
- » **Look for ways to make your church buildings and gardens greener.** Find inspiration from the Green Church Awards. www.churchtimes.co.uk/green-church
- » **Sign up for the Eco Church programme.** Their free online survey and supporting resources will help your church to express your care for God's world and the actions you take will count towards a prestigious Eco Church Award. ecochurch.arocha.org.uk
- » **Inspire others in your church to think more deeply about creation care.** Operation Noah's new study guide, launched in spring this year, helps you explore a scriptural basis for caring about creation. operationnoah.org/get-involved/outreach-campaign
- » **Choose food on the LOAF principles:** Locally produced; Organically grown; Animal friendly; and fairly traded. You can find ideas on the Green Christian website. As well as adopting these guidelines for as much as possible of your own food purchasing, encourage those responsible for your church's catering to do the same. www.greenchristian.org.uk/resources/loaf
- » **Use the 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' principle** to reduce the amount of rubbish that goes to landfill, to save money, and to ease the pressure on the finite resources of the planet. As far as you can afford to do so, make purchases that are designed to last and/or that can readily be repaired rather than needing to be replaced. See, for example, uk.buymeonce.com



Websites for Baptist Churches and Ministries

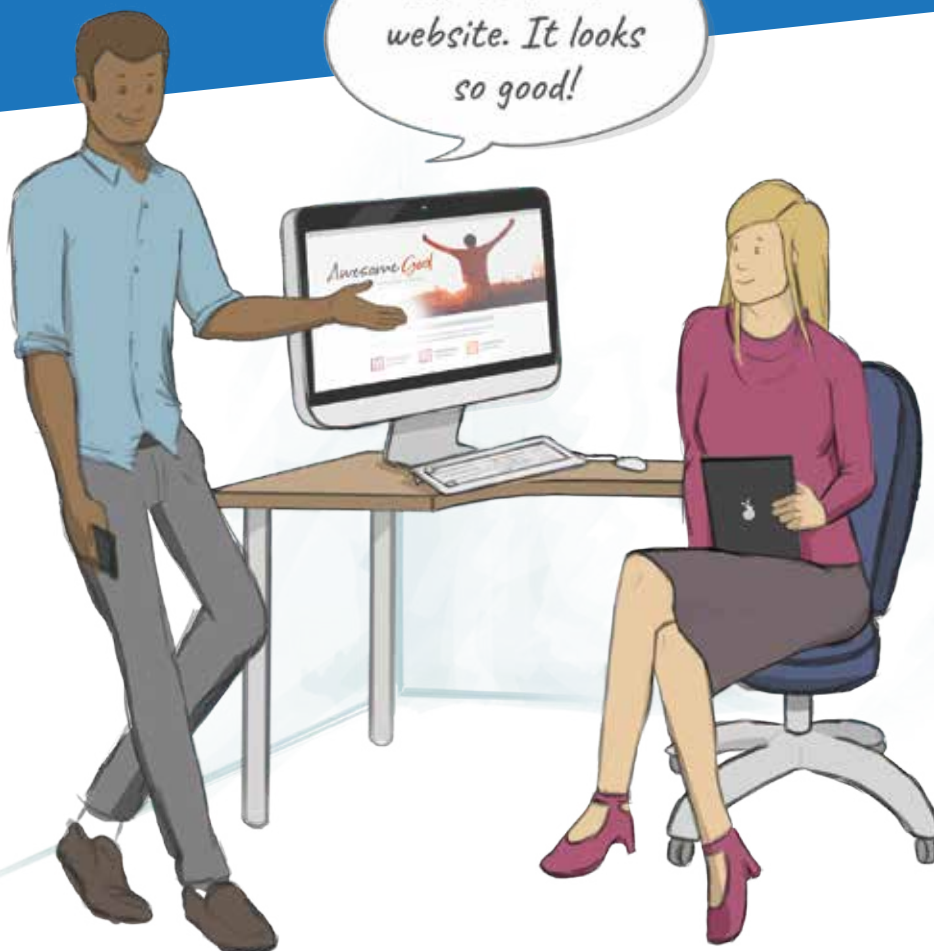
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Divine windows: glimpses of God in life, the universe... and everything

Incoming President Dave Gregory outlines his theme

I was on the phone recently to a young man about my car insurance. "If you don't mind me asking, what kind of Doctor are you?" he asked.

"Not a medical one, so don't ask me about your bad elbow," I replied. "I'm a Doctor of weather".

I explained that I had worked in research at the Met Office for over ten years, but that now I was a Baptist minister. We chatted for a while about his interest in science as well as his understanding of the Bible and faith.

His response at the end was fairly typical: "I've never come across that combination before – someone who is interested in science and believes in God!"



photo: Croxley Green Baptist Church

I get a similar response from the parents who come along to 'Dr Dave's Science Lab' I run as part of our Messy Church each month at **Croxley Green Baptist Church**. Yet science is a creative activity as much as art and music, expressing and sharing in the creativity of God. It is a window to the wonder, complexity and the ordering of creation that no other generation

has been able to gaze through as we do. Yet too often when it comes to faith, the curtains are firmly drawn. Our wondering stops at the beauty and complexity of the material world,



rather than allowing it to draw us deeper, to the divine source that shapes and sustains it all.

We try to keep the curtains open, often with arguments from the world of apologetics. We might point to the apparent coincidence that the universe seems just right for life such as ours to exist (a continuing enigma for scientists).

But we become disturbed: the vastness of the cosmos, its ancient origins, the gradual development of life with all its ups and downs; all ask questions of our understanding of God as creator and redeemer, expressed long ago by the Psalmist: 'What are we that you are mindful of us'. We too are tempted to pull the curtains across and stick to the certainty of the faith that we think we know.



The curtains were firmly shut as I embarked on a degree in Physics and Astrophysics. The attraction of science eclipsed my connection with the idea of God. Yet, as I learnt more of the complexity and order of creation, from the smallest to the larger scales, I began to wonder, until one day walking along the street to my morning lectures, a thought popped into my head: 'Maybe there is a God'.

It was quickly followed by: 'But what has that to do with me?' The curtains had opened to a new way of seeing. My wondering would lead to a gradual re-discovery of faith as I encountered Jesus through worship, the word and the world.

While the ancients did not have science as we know it, they were acute observers of the world, with eyes that perceived the wonder of the material as pointing to an encounter with God. 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.' Throughout the Bible, God is often visually encountered through creation: Noah in the rainbow; Moses in the burning bush; Job in the song of creation in the face of his incessant questioning. Jesus' parables and miracles often revealed the character and power of God through nature.



Image: NASA, ESA and the HST Frontier Fields team

Hubble Deep Field

And while often our own tradition of worship focuses upon words and music, encountering God through the window of creation has a long tradition within the life of the Church, maintained within Celtic and Franciscan spiritualities along with the Orthodox tradition.

Bonaventure, a 13th century Franciscan theologian, spoke of viewing creation through a Trinitarian lens; of how its origin, diversity and purpose revealed the power, creativity and sustaining work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I wonder what he would have made of the 'Hubble Deep Field', a favourite image of mine. This picture reveals a tiny part of the night sky just above the bowl of The Plough constellation.

A full moon would appear 100 times bigger than this patch, yet still it reveals 3000 galaxies of all sizes, shapes and colours, some as old as a few billion years after the Big Bang. Scale up the entire night sky and it is estimated there are 250 billion galaxies in the whole universe.

What does such wonder allow us to glimpse of God? Through Bonaventure's lens, for example, the vastness points to the power of God and the majesty of his creative vision. The diversity of forms speak of the Word by which all things are richly made and in whom all things hold together. The presence of the Spirit connects creation to divine being, shaping it according to his purpose; the forming, death and rising of stars allow a being to come forth that can look beyond the surface of creation to the wonder of God in whom, as Paul said to the philosophers in Athens, "we live, and move and have our being".

Of course, there are other windows within everyday life through which we encounter the wonder of life and God. For you, it may be music or art. It may be the beauty of mountains, or forests or valleys. Or the changing cycle of the seasons in your back garden, or the complexity of even the smallest plant growing from the tiniest seed, or in a 'chance' meeting with a friend, or a stranger, or in enjoying a meal with loved ones. Perhaps you too can be a window for others to gaze through and catch a glimpse of God and the hope that his presence brings.



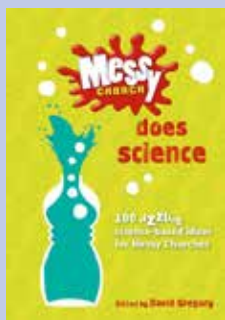
Photo: Dave Gregory

Nauta in Peru where BMS runs a training centre for pastors of churches in the river communities along the Peruvian Amazon River

Science in faith

Dave Gregory is one of a number of Baptists working to promote the interplay between science and faith.

He edited *Messy Church Does Science* (2017), a resource containing 100 experiments graded for mess, danger and difficulty, as well as 'big thinking' and 'big questions' links.



The book was made possible with funding from Scientists in Congregations, a grant scheme open to all mainstream Christian churches, and

part of a three year project at Durham University run in partnership with the Church of England.

Other recipients included:

'*Big Questions - Any Answers?*' a series of talks arranged for the Tyne Valley area, in which leading scientists who are Christians tackled some of the big scientific issues of today and what the Christian faith has to say about them.

It was run by Professor William (Bill) Clegg (pictured), Emeritus Professor of Structural Crystallography at Newcastle University and a member of **Stocksfield Baptist Church**, and supported by Peter Jorysz, Bill's minister.



Re:Think Worcester aims to communicate the complementary nature of science and faith to young people at 6th form and undergraduate level. The project is run by Dr Kim Stansfield, member of the World Mission Task Force at **St Peter's Baptist Church** in Worcester and Senior Lecturer in Systems Engineering at Warwick University, and Jim Smith, a Methodist from Bromsgrove.

Church Scientific, based in Baptist churches in Leeds but open to all, sees science students and professionals from congregations across the city give talks leading into discussion sessions. All the presentations are available on the project's website churchscientific.org.uk

For more on all projects visit baptist.org.uk/science

Yet, wonder is a fragile thing. It is easily missed, and even when it embraces us, we can miss what it might reveal. For some, while it raises questions and evokes feelings that can be overwhelming, that's as far as it goes. For others, it draws them into deeper possibilities.

I don't know what that young man in the call centre will remember of our conversation. Perhaps it will fade away amid all the different voices that he hears each day. But when he next sees Brian Cox enthusing over the amazing things that science reveals about the cosmos we live in, or looks into the sky on a dark night to see myriads of stars, or just takes a good look at a leaf on a tree as he walks through a wood, perhaps he will remember the strange person who has an interest in science and God and think 'maybe?'

Dave Gregory is Senior Minister of **Croxley Green Baptist Church**. He becomes Baptist Union President at the 2018 Baptist Assembly




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Photo: Corin Lawfull Photography | corinlawfullphotography.com

“It makes space for awe and wonder”

Forest School is helping primary school children connect with and care for nature. Baptist church member **Sarah Lawfull** is one of its most compelling advocates

“I’m passionate about children’s wellbeing,” says Sarah Lawfull. “And I’ve seen time and again the wonderful impact Forest School has on both children - and their teachers.”

Forest School is a specialised learning approach increasingly used by primary schools across the UK. It offers children regular opportunities to spend time in a woodland or natural environment. It is learner-centred, with roots dating back to early years pioneers in outdoor learning.

Sarah, a member of **The Ladygrove Church**, a Baptist/Anglican Local Ecumenical Partnership in Didcot, now teaches others how to lead Forest School. She saw how well children learnt outside earlier in her career as an early years primary school teacher. But post Year One, she also experienced the impact of increased testing and targets, a more restricted, classroom-bound culture, and a subsequent drop in pupil enthusiasm.

“My favourite part was the way we could be free to do things independently”
Harry, aged 9

One summer she discovered Forest School through the Earth Trust, an environmental learning charity in Oxfordshire. “It was amazing. I loved it,” she says, “and I thought: I’ve got to teach this.”

A number of factors make it so appealing, Sarah explains. One is that it builds a safe space, and helps to create community. All participants are viewed as equal, unique and valuable. The children need to rely on each other to get things done. Stories are told around a campfire.

It also offers a connection, in many cases a reconnection, with nature. “Playing in the woods and playing in nature is so freeing,” Sarah says. “The way our lives are lived now, we don’t do enough of it.”

Photo: Corin Lawfull Photography | corinlawfullphotography.com



Forest School leaders are not there to disseminate information as they would in a more traditional nature walk, but to ask sensitive questions to encourage an appreciation and wonder for and an appropriate response to the environment in which they're in. It enables participants to be creative, and fosters independence. There's space simply to be, too.

With the support of her then school, Sarah trained to be a Forest School leader, and subsequently became one of the first trainers to be endorsed by the Forest School Association. She led Forest School training for Oxfordshire Forest School Service, and became involved at national level, helping to write national qualifications and standards. Forest School became an official association in 2012, and Sarah is a director. More recently she launched a social enterprise, *Where The Fruit Is*, which offers accredited Forest School training as part of its wider mission to engage, enable and equip educators, vulnerable teenagers and disenfranchised young families through nature connection.

Over the years Sarah has seen Forest School positively impact thousands of children. She's witnessed how children with special educational needs have blossomed in a Forest School environment. How socially awkward, clumsy boys become 'heroes' because of what they can bring to a Forest School session, such as their strength.

"I learnt how to be trusted without the teachers knowing what we were doing!"

Molly, aged 10



Forest School trainer - Sarah Lawfull



Photo: Corin Lawfull Photography | corinlawfullphotography.com

"Forest School had an immediate positive impact on his behaviour"
A teacher

She's watched children's understanding of their environment grow. "At the start of each session, we always make clear that we are going to care for ourselves / our wood / and our world. They begin to understand that their actions have consequences, and we help them make informed choices. In this way we are helping young people to learn to care for the planet."

She's also seen how Forest School has benefitted teachers, giving them time and space in a natural environment away from the demands of the classroom. She has worked with vulnerable teenagers and disadvantaged adults too, and all have benefitted from Forest School. (One aim of *Where The Fruit Is* is to reach more of these groups.)

While Forest School is not a Christian movement, everything about it in terms of respect for each other and the wider world chimes with Sarah's understanding of spirituality and the Christian faith.

"I don't have ADHD when I'm out in the woods"
David, aged 14

"God repeatedly says children are to be treasured, that they're a gift. We've got to think very carefully how we teach them. Forest School ethos is that each individual person matters. It makes space for awe and wonder.

"Whether you believe in God or not, part of you is created to be in nature; to think about things that are bigger than us. I love it. I've been blown away by its impact."

"It has been lovely watching her confidence grow"
A parent

At Forest School all participants are viewed as:

- » equal, unique and valuable
- » competent to explore and discover
- » entitled to experience appropriate risk and challenge
- » entitled to choose, and to initiate and drive their own learning and development
- » entitled to experience regular success
- » entitled to develop positive relationships with themselves and other people
- » entitled to develop a strong, positive relationship with their natural world

For more about Forest School, visit: www.forestschoolassociation.org
For more on *Where The Fruit Is*, visit: www.wherethefruitis.co.uk
or www.facebook.com/wherethefruitis.oxon



'It's the earth we all live in: we have to take care of it.'



Illustration: freepik.com

How do young people feel about caring for the environment? How worried are they for the future? And if there's one thing they'd urge us all to do, what would it be?

Baptists Together magazine chatted to a group of secondary school pupils about these issues

What are your thoughts on caring for the environment?

Protecting the environment is really important. It's the earth we all live in: we have to take care of it. - **Nerea**

It's where we live. If we destroy it, if we ruin the ozone layer by using things we shouldn't, ultimately we are going to die. It's important to look after it: it looks after us, it gives us a safe space to be. - **Emily**

I think we should all play a role in looking after the environment. It could be little things like recycling, picking up litter, or turning off our lights in our homes. - **Molly**

We should make sure the environment is cared for because the animals and wildlife that live there could die out if we don't. - **Alina**

We need to protect it a bit more because the animals are being more affected than we are at the moment. - **Caitlin**

How do you change attitudes?

One of the best ways would be to show a success story. Think big - what would it look like if London became an emission-free zone? - **Michael**

There's a need for more resources. Money is always a problem. A lot is dependent on how much funding there is. - **Molly**

I'm hopeful that electric cars will become more normal. It's like when cars first started - not many people could afford them. But now everyone has them. - **Nerea**

How worried are you for the future?

I'm not too worried because the Government have just issued their 25 year plan, and with time and resources, we will get there. However, with the amount of plastic that's in our seas, I'm wondering if the 25 years is too long and it will be out of control. - Molly

I'm quite worried. A lot of people still don't understand the damage it's doing. And those who do understand don't want to do anything about it, they'd rather take the easier option. It might not be affecting them – but it's likely to affect their children. It's easier to ignore and move on with your life the way it was. - Emily

I'm half/half. People are doing things to stop it. But there are many people who just aren't listening and don't want to co-operate. I saw somewhere that there will be more plastic in the seas than fish. That is worrying. - Nerea

Because we are doing some things to try and sort it out, that's good. But there are some people who just don't try. It's almost like they have given up. - Alina

I think we should try a bit harder, because we are doing things. But the ice is still melting. - Caitlin

I'm less worried. Five years ago, maybe, but today we've got more policies in place, like the 10p bags in supermarkets, which have made a difference. We've got shows like *Blue Planet*, which are more focused on the fact we are polluting the oceans. Go down a country road and you will see rubbish everywhere - hopefully that's going to stop. - Michael

What kind of things have you done in your own home?

We installed a motion sensor. It switches lights off automatically if it doesn't detect any movement (which can be annoying...!)
- Michael

My mum is a member of a rowing club. They were all using plastic cups. She's got them to bring in their own cups. - Alina

We never use plastic bags when we go shopping – we always take our own. - Nerea

We use low energy light bulbs at home, and always try to turn the lights off. - Molly

What's one thing you would advise everyone to do?

Don't litter! There are bins everywhere. It's so easy not to litter. But people can't be bothered.
- Molly

Use less plastic. There are websites that can help. - Nerea

For me it would be turning off the lights. It's such a simple thing to do, and saves so much electricity. - Issy

Next time you go and get a coffee – keep the cup. Do that for a month. At the end of the month, see how many cups you have. Then go and buy a reusable one, because you can use that forever. That would massively cut down on how much you're using. - Michael

Be aware of campaigns. A lot of people say they can make a difference in these small acts – that's great, it really helps. But people don't realise they can make a huge difference in signing petitions that campaign against environmental damage. It just takes a second. I've signed some petitions – not all have worked, but some have, and it feels really good to know you've contributed to making something better. - Emily

When you buy your first car, don't 'mod it' by buying massive exhausts that make a huge noise. Firstly, it's annoying and obnoxious; and secondly, it produces more emissions than a regular exhaust. Leave it – no one thinks it sounds cool! - Michael

With thanks to

Alina, Caitlin and Nerea (Year 7),
Emily and Michael (Year 9),
Molly and Issy (Year 12),
all pupils at Luckley House School in Berkshire

Watch a video with the Luckley House School students sharing their thoughts on the environment, at:
www.baptist.org.uk/luckley



**Pray for Schools****Fortnight****6-20 May**

Bringing together people from local churches and others involved in education to pray for schools

www.prayforschools.org

**Thy Kingdom Come****10-20 May**

A global prayer movement, inviting Christians around the world to pray between Ascension and Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus Christ

www.thykingdomcome.global

**Baptist Assembly****12 May****Peterborough**

Join us with a group from your church at the 2018 Baptist Assembly in Peterborough

www.baptistassembly.co.uk

**Christian Aid Week****13 - 19 May**

www.caweek.org

**Big Church Day Out****26 - 27 May, West Sussex;****1-2 June, Cheshire**

Contemporary Christian music festival

bigchurchdayout.com

**The Big Lunch****3 June**

The one day get together for neighbours

www.thebiglunch.com

Events

**Father's Day****17 June****Refugee Week****18-24 June**

A UK-wide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK, and encourages a better understanding between communities

refugeeweek.org.uk

**Celebrating, Surviving and Thriving - Women in Baptist Ministry****28-29 June****Birmingham**

www.baptist.org.uk/womenministry

**Sea Sunday****8 July**

Churches around the world come together to remember seafarers and pray for them, their families and those who support them.

www.sailors-society.org/ seasunday

**Keswick Convention****14-20 July; 21-27 July; 28****July-3 August**

keswickministries.org

**Soul Survivor****21 - 25 July Kinross,****Scotland****4 - 8 August Week A, Stafford****18 - 22 and 24 - 28****August Weeks B and C Peterborough**

soulsurvivor.com

**Naturally****Supernatural****28 July - 2 August****Stafford**

Event from the organisers of Soul Survivor aimed at anyone who wants to move in the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit

naturallysupernatural.co.uk

**New Wine****28 July - 3 August, 5 - 11****August****Royal Bath and West Showground, Somerset**

www.new-wine.org

**Greenbelt****24-27 August****Boughton House, Northamptonshire**

www.greenbelt.org.uk

**Education Sunday****2 September**

www.cte.org.uk

**Seventh Annual Sam****Sharpe Lecture****18 October****London**

www.baptist.org.uk/samsharpe

For more, visit

www.baptist.org.uk/events

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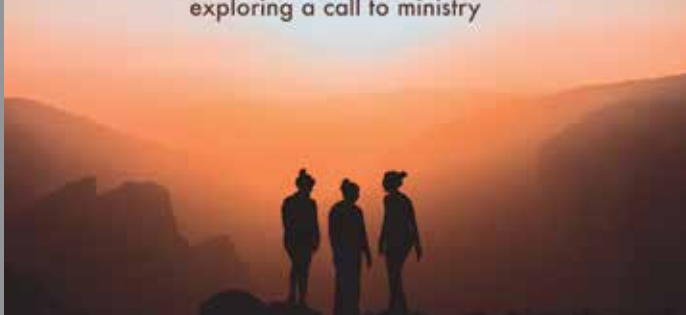


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Where? At IMC in Birmingham

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*"I would rather die upon yonder gallows,
than live in slavery."*

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Creation Care Resources

A Film to watch

Before the Flood (2016)



Before the Flood presents a riveting account of the dramatic changes now occurring around the world due to climate change. The film follows Leonardo DiCaprio as he travels to five continents and the Arctic speaking to scientists, world leaders, activists and local residents to gain a deeper understanding of this complex issue.

"Screening *Before the Flood* to our church had a huge impact. It helped them understand the importance of the issue." Kirstin Aitken, Norwich Central Baptist Church

A Book to read

The Earth Will Teach You by Kevin Durrant



All of Creation is groaning in the face of environmental and ecological destruction, but what is the message that it is speaking to us? How can we listen to what the animals, birds and the earth itself are telling us? And how, then, should we live? In this series of tender but practical reflections, Baptist minister Kevin

Durrant helps us to discern the voice of nature and the testimony of Scripture as they relate to the world around us and our responsibilities to it.

"This rich book gets beneath the skin of the standard Christian response to creation care (isn't creation beautiful, must do better) and thoughtfully considers a wide variety of biblical texts to engage deeply with the subject. One to read slowly, re-read, and think hard about. Highly recommended." HE Paynter, Amazon

A Paper to consider

Joy in Enough:

Awakening to a New Economics



A vision paper from the charity Green Christian for a fair and sustainable economy. Explore the challenge we face, the alternative we imagine, and what the role of the Christian faith might be.

joyinenough.org

A Campaign to join

The Big Shift



Christian Aid's lobbying of banks to stop financing coal power plants and build support for renewable energy. Includes briefing documents, petition sheets, campaign notes and prayers.

christianaid.org.uk/bigshift

A Study to commend

Hope in God's Future:

Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change



The report and study guide produced by the Joint Public Issues Team offers a theological reflection on scientific accounts of the threats presented by climate change in the context of affirming the triune God as creator and redeemer of the universe.

baptist.org.uk/hopeingodsfuture

An Eco Survey to take

Eco Church



Take A Rocha's Eco Survey to discover your church's creation care progress and plan future initiatives.

ecochurch.arocha.org.uk

Rediscovering our prophetic voice



Photo: luoman | istockphoto.com

Why is it that when I sit down to my regular breakfast of coffee and yoghurt I am suddenly hit by a twinge of conscience? I stare at the empty plastic pot and plastic capsule that I've just retrieved from the coffee maker and wonder what damage I will do by disposing of them. How long will it be before the coffee capsules come in some non-plastic alternative, or become such a pariah that automatic coffee makers are consigned to the back of the cupboard along with the fondue set, food warmers and other must-have home accessories of the 1980s?

The director of a major food retailer recently attributed his own company's commitment to be plastic-free within five years to one single episode of 'Blue Planet'. Such is the impact of modern media; get the right message, the right presenter, place it at the centre of a much-trailered, prime-time series and you can change the behaviour of an entire nation!

Much of the narrative of this edition of Baptists Together is founded on our belief that the world we inhabit was created by the God we worship, and we are called to be its stewards. Yet it still feels to me as though we are following an agenda that we should be setting.

It is only in the last few decades that scientists have alerted us to the environmental cost of our insatiable pursuit of convenient consumption, highlighting that delicate balance between reaping the benefit of the earth's resources and destroying them. Their message is that this world is precious and we have a responsibility for its care - something the Bible has been saying all along.

Yet the world that embraces this message is one in which many perceive of the Church as increasingly irrelevant. And for me this raises some serious questions as to why we have so overlooked this key element in our faith story. Why has Creation been more of a point to prove than a value-system to be celebrated and embraced?

In fact I would go so far as to suggest that most Christians' environmental convictions owe more to science than the narratives of their faith. And not only that; as those who claim to be the earthly representatives of this world's creator, we still seem to lag behind the environmental agendas of others. I can't go into a coffee shop or food-outlet without being bombarded by their commitment to be a zero-carbon company, before being carefully directed to dispose of my waste in a variety of bins and orifices to ensure that this goal is achieved.

If I'm honest, I can only remember walking into one Baptist church and being so overtly presented by the same level of concern and practical response. (And I am pleased to see that their endeavours are featured within this edition.)

I hope that these stories help us not simply to 'do our bit' but re-discover something of our prophetic voice in the world. If people are going to take us seriously when we claim that this earth has its source in the God we worship, they need to see that we take its care and preservation seriously. If our churches send out a message that we are not really that bothered, we can't blame people for assuming that we're not really that bothered about the One who made it.

Phil Jump is the
Regional Minister
Team Leader at the
North Western
Baptist Association



Photo: belterz | istockphoto.com

A LITURGY FOR AN ECO CHURCH

Taken from the Green Communion Liturgy prepared by A Rocha and published with permission.

Visit ecochurch.arocha.org.uk for more.

Gathering

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lord, fill us with the knowledge of your will
that we may bear fruit in every good work.

Colossians 1: 9-10

A hymn/song is sung, music is played, or silence is kept, during which the worship space may be 'greened' – with an altar cloth, a lectern fall, changed lighting, projected image, or other green display brought in or revealed

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,
how majestic is your name in all the earth;
you dry up the green tree
and make the dry tree flourish;
in your hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being;
As your Son made the multitude to sit down on the
green grass
and fed them with the bread of life,
make us to lie down in green pastures
and lead us beside still waters;
so that, like a tree planted by water,
which does not fear the heat but whose leaves shall
stay green,
we may be refreshed and sustained in you,
and honour the everlasting covenant
you have established with your creation,
for you have seen that it is very good.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God forever.

*Psalm 8:1; Job 12:10; Ezekiel 17:24;
Psalm 24:1; Mark 6:39; Psalm 23:2;
Jeremiah 17:8; Genesis 19:17*

Word

A psalm, reading(s), and/or canticle(s) follow

Act of Eco Commitment

Noah made sacrifice to the Lord God, and the Lord
said in his heart
'I will never again curse the ground because of
humankind.'
Genesis 8:21

As we offer our own sacrifice of prayer and
thanksgiving,
we pledge ourselves to honour the everlasting
covenant between God, the creator of all things who
loves the world, and the creation which responds in
joyful praise.

Let us pray.

**Lord God,
the earth is yours and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;**

Psalm 24:1

**hear our prayer, accept our service and receive our
pledge:**

May our *worship* honour your generous gifts; may we
explore together our responsibilities to the creation
of which we are a part, in preaching and teaching, in
prayer and praise:

for the earth is yours and all that is in it.

May our *church buildings* be houses of prayer, temples
to your glory, and signs of the renewing power of your
grace to sustain and refresh all life;
may our use and development of the resources we
have inherited be an example of careful nurturing of
discipleship and fruitful witness:

for the earth is yours and all that is in it.

May we allow the *land* we occupy to flourish in your
care; may we share and protect both open space
and managed earth, and build community with and
through the land and all it sustains:

for the earth is yours and all that is in it.

May we live as the body of Christ, fostering relationships within our *local and global communities*, and raising awareness of how our actions affect our brothers and sisters across the world, having a particular care for the poorest and most vulnerable:
for the earth is yours and all that is in it.

May we show in our *lives* what we claim in our words, revealing in our discipleship our love for you, for each other, and for your world, following your command to bear fruit that will last: *John 15:17*
for the earth is yours and all that is in it.

Lord God,
we pledge ourselves to your service in caring for your creation,
that your kingdom may grow from the seed of hope
into a tree of righteousness and justice for the world,
and the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay
and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Romans 8:21*
Amen.

The Collect

O Lord our God, who brought your people into a good land,
and sends showers of blessing that the earth shall yield its increase;
flourish within us your gift of faith
that, in our worship, our churches, our communities, and our lives,
we may honour and renew your creation
and join in obedience with the wind and the waters,
the wilderness and the desert,

the birds of the air and the fish of the sea,
and all created things to give glory and praise to the image of the invisible God,
the first born of all creation,
Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

*Deuteronomy 8:7; Ezekiel 34:26; Mark 4:41;
Isaiah 35:1; Job 12:7; Colossians 1:15*

Filled with awe at the wonders and works of God,
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

The service concludes with a blessing or the Grace



Photo: rui_noronha | istockphoto.com

Christians 'less concerned about the environment' – US study

Christians in the United States have become less concerned about the environment over the last 20 years, according to a new study.

The study analysed the Gallup's annual surveys on the environment. Each year around 1,000 respondents are asked whether they are worried about water, air, soil or toxic waste pollution, whether they see global warming as a threat, and whether they participate in the environmental movement.

David Konisky, a political scientist at Indiana University, examined the surveys during three years of the 1990s and then annually from 2005 to 2015.

"The idea was to see if attitudes have changed over time," Mr Konisky told Religion News Service (RNS).

"In fact, the trends move in the opposite direction. People's concern over issues such as pollution, in the air, water or toxic waste, their concern about climate change and its urgency, those have all been declining over this time period studied."

For instance, more Christians prioritised economic growth over protecting the environment in 2015 than they did in 1990, he discovered.

However, the study does not reflect the impact of 'Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home, Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on the environment.

Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of the Yale Forum on Religion and the Ecology, was sanguine about the findings. "This involves long-term change and that's not going to happen in 10 or 20 years," she said. "All social movements have had pushback. That's going to happen. But change will go forward."

Others questioned whether the Gallup surveys reliably reflect the concerns of religious people. For many evangelicals, words in the survey like 'climate change' and 'global warming' invoke pitched political and ideological battles, reported RNS. They may have been more responsive when asked about environmental stewardship — or, in the more common Christian parlance, 'creation care'.

Next steps for Next Meal

A creative initiative that uses technology to connect homeless people with food and shelter is seeking to expand beyond London

Next Meal is a website which creates a database of London's soup kitchens and harnesses GPS to direct homeless people to their nearest hot meal.

It's the brainchild of Martin Stone, who leads the Muswell Hill Soup Kitchen at **Muswell Hill Baptist Church**.

Alongside the website, he has created small cards for people to give to those who are begging for money. The cards state the Next Meal website address, which people can then access on their phones (which many homeless people have) or through a library.

"It's a simple thing," Martin explains. "We are saying to the homeless person, "We are sorry you are homeless, but here's something that will help you – information about where you can get meals throughout the week".

"As Christians we can't walk on by. This is a way of being compassionate without giving away money that you can't trust where it goes."



Details are being gathered so it can be available in towns and cities across the country.

To order a pack of Next Meal cards, or for more information, contact Martin on: martin.stone@nextmeal.co.uk

Visit Next Meal: nextmeal.co.uk

'Local pantry' social franchise launched

Organisations across the UK can now get tools and support to set up a 'Local Pantry' community food store, after the charity Church Action on Poverty (CAP) and its partners launched Your Local Pantry as a social franchise.

Your Local Pantry is a volunteer-led community initiative that helps struggling families make their money go further by reducing food shopping bills (members can save over £500 each year); providing advice and support; and developing skills through volunteering and other opportunities within the project.

For just £2.50 per week, members from the local community can do a shop and choose at least 10 grocery items, including free vegetables. Pantries are run for the community, by the community, aimed at helping to stretch budgets further and bring people together. They differ from foodbanks in a number of ways.

To find out more, visit yourlocalpantry.co.uk

'More than just a chippy'

The country's first community-owned chippy has opened, and Baptists are at the heart of it

Chelmund's Fish and Chips is an ethical business in North Solihull which not only serves a tasty menu, but ploughs its profits back into the community.

"We saw new shop units going up as part of the Solihull regeneration programme", says Neil Roberts, minister of **Chelmsley Wood Baptist Church**, "and we thought, someone will put a chippy in there.

"Why not us?"

Chelmsley Wood, still one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England despite the regeneration, had been without a chippy for about six years. Neil and others didn't want a large chain coming in and taking the profits to distant shareholders. Instead they saw an opportunity to benefit the local economy on every level.

The idea was pitched to developer Central England Co-Op, which was supportive and asked for a proposal. What followed was 'two years of planning, negotiating (and a few sleepless nights)', which bore fruit on 1 March, when the chippy opened to long queues at the height of the cold snap.

Chelmsley Wood Baptist Church and local ecumenical partnership St Andrew's (Anglican/Methodist) have teamed up with three local organisations to form a social enterprise to manage the business. And they stress it's a business, not a charitable project.

"We wanted to be an example of an ethical business which has the community's interests at heart," Neil explains. "The profits are locked in to guarantee community benefit."



There is also a strong emphasis on local employment, as well as using local suppliers and offering a quality product. All profits will be reinvested back into the community.

From the church's point of view, this is not an evangelistic project: it's missional, Neil says. "The church is a clearly stated presence in the community.

"How do we live the gospel here? This is a way of supporting our community." He believes more churches will consider social enterprises in the future due to a combination of financial challenges and the opportunities social enterprises bring.

The project was supported by a grant from the Heart of England Baptist Association (HEBA), which Neil said was crucial in unlocking further funding.

"Without the support from HEBA, we would have really struggled to get off the ground," Neil says. "They saw it as an innovative missional project. They were great."

New film to highlight excellence in safeguarding

A new film which aims to highlight excellence in safeguarding for Baptist churches has been released

Level 1: Excellence in Safeguarding outlines key messages for church members and visitors, and is designed to be shown in all age services and at the start of holiday clubs.

It's based on a script by Baptist minister Nick Lear and was performed by the drama group at **Oadby Baptist Church** in Leicester. The filming took place at the church.

The new film is all about making people aware of general safeguarding principles; that a church has good processes in place; and the importance of listening to children and others who have concerns.

The previous safeguarding film offered by Baptists Together struck a different tone: produced by the police a decade ago when there was less awareness of safeguarding, it referenced

tragic cases such as Baby P and Victoria Climbié to underline a message that safeguarding issues could happen in a church.

"We wanted a much more positive message," explained Rachel Stone, Baptists Together People Support and Safeguarding Manager, "and something to reflect the huge amount of safeguarding work Baptist churches have undertaken in recent years.

"The previous film was hard hitting and couldn't be shown to children.

"We wanted the new one to give a message that says 'Here in this church safeguarding is something we take seriously. But, if you are worried about anything, come and talk to somebody'.

"We wanted something that could be shown to everyone, including children and vulnerable adults."

www.baptist.org.uk/safeguarding



An interview with

Alison Hovell

Youth and community worker at
Springfield Park Baptist Church in Essex

How did you become a Christian?

I was adopted into a Christian family and have always felt loved and blessed, and it is in my nature to love and help people. I love talking to people (as a very young girl, I am told, I used to stand at the front gate and ask passers-by to be my friend!)

At the age of 15 I dropped out of church - it's a tricky age and I am conscious of this when working with our young people.

Fortunately I realised that God never leaves you, and got my life back on track. Peter and I were married at Springfield Park Baptist Church, and have been members there for over 20 years. We are blessed with two teenagers, Rosie and Ethan.

How did your current role at Springfield come about?

About a year and a half ago I suffered a bad attack of sciatica and gave up my job as a teaching assistant. At the time, the church was looking for a youth and community worker. God gently nudged us in the same direction.

I love the way that God develops us and helps us to grow through painful situations. I love my work at church. It's the only job I've had where I feel I can use all the gifts I've been blessed with.

What does it involve?

I'm responsible for overseeing the youth work. Alongside the Sunday morning teaching, we give them opportunities to take part in services and lead them. We have varied social activities, including film nights, games and strategy evenings, a visit to a trampoline park and even a rambling and stargazing night.

We try to link up with the C of E church at the end of our road, and there are friendships developing. I am planning to take them to Soul Survivor.



And the community side?

It's largely based around food! We have teamed up with the charity Fareshare, and twice a week I collect waste food from Tesco. This is offered to the people who attend our drop-ins, and taken to residents on our estate by a faithful church member with a trolley. I purloin any vegetables to make nourishing vats of soup. I love to try out new recipes.

We have drop-ins for tea and bric-a-brac two Wednesdays a month, and every Thursday morning we run Coffee Hub, the Springfield Stitchers, and then soup lunch! We put away our knitting needles, and sit down to a bowl of soup with toast. We don't make a charge, but will accept a donation of no more than £1.

It's a brilliant opportunity to catch up with old friends and meet new ones. The conversations we have are varied. It's a bit like a housegroup without the Bible study. Several people now come on a Sunday because of these relationships.

I also love arts and crafts and have organised Christmas craft evenings and summer sessions for all ages - another great opportunity to meet new families.

Any Bible verse particularly resonating with you?

One verse that always makes me smile and seems very applicable is Hebrews 13:2 - *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*

I would love to think I have entertained an angel at some point in my life. I certainly value being able to connect with people and hopefully make a small difference in their lives.



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