

A Vision of Creation

Environmental Policy & Procedures for Blackburn Diocese

The Revelation of God in Creation

The grace of God as shown forth in the Passion of Christ, welcoming us into a relationship of love, with no compulsion and with the prospect of a new and glorious liberty: this is nothing other than the same generosity with which God called life into being at the outset, called us out of nothing other than his own imagination, and for nothing other than to enjoy him for ever. On this costly generosity, and on nothing else, do we - and all that has evolved - depend for our very existence.

And the Spirit of God which claims us as members of the community of the redeemed in our baptism, this is none other than the same Spirit which brooded on the face of the waters before the start of time, moving back and forth, telling of the extent of God's yearning that we and all that there is might know him.

Key texts: Genesis 1,1-2,4a, 2,4b-25; Job 28, 1-11; Romans 8,18-25; Colossians 1,15-20; John 1,1-14; 3,1-8.

The Environmental Policy of Blackburn Diocese is grounded in this dependence upon the will of God for his Church here and now, and in the future that he allows us to shape together. It is our

response of the Church of England's vision for a sustainable future in *Sharing God's Planet*, a report from the Mission and Public Affairs Council, produced in 2005 and obtainable from Church House Publishing.

In his Foreword to that report, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Rowan Williams, tells us that we are not consumers of what God has made but are in communion with it. Understanding the workings of the environment, making life on the earth sustainable, is a matter of justice – justice for poorer peoples damaged by the selfishness of richer nations, justice for creatures unable to defend themselves against selfish exploitation, justice for the earth itself.

The Environmental Policy has been drafted by a Sub-Committee of the Board for Social Responsibility, but its recommendations are a challenge to every sphere of the Church's life in the Diocese. The various committees of the Diocese will be able to translate the recommendations into the precise and technical form appropriate to their own realm of activity and recommend revision. We wish this lively debate to be part of the deepening of our faith in a God who makes all things new.

This document outlines a commitment to a *Vision of Creation* that can be shared by the whole people of God in Blackburn diocese and indicates thus ► some particular things which parishes and congregations can do, and which can change individual lives at home and at work. It commits us to working with other Christian denominations and peoples of other faiths, and none, to care together for the earth, and to establish peace and justice among all God's creatures.

The Celebration of God in Creation

Humankind is unique among all living things in being able to proclaim that the natural world we depend on and perceive with our senses is a Creation that is dependent upon the love of God and exists at some cost to him. On behalf of Creation, the Church has a calling to give voice to this through celebration in worship and prayer, proclaiming 'O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord'.

Key texts: I Chron 29, 10-14; Psalms 8, 65, 104, 145, 147, 148; Song of the Three 26-68.

In its commemoration of the sacrificial grace of God in Jesus Christ, the Church takes 'creatures of bread and wine', setting them in a framework of blessing and remembrance. These Eucharistic

gifts speak of God's passion for all he has made, that through the flesh and blood of Creation he makes himself known. On the Body of Christ, the costliness of this engagement with Creation is seen to have left its mark. All of our takings from nature need to be marked by a blessing: that is, by prayerful declaration that they - and we - are in a state of dependency upon the love of God.

The Liturgical Committee of the diocese promotes the understanding and use of appropriate liturgies, and how to enrich the Church's calendar with commemorations of God's grace in Creation, providing prayers for organisations, groups, families and individuals through which blessings can be made.



► **Think afresh about Scripture readings, psalms and hymns that reflect the celebration of God's gifts in Creation**

► **Involve members of local environmental groups in the organisation of seasonal events such as harvest festivals, Rogationtide and the feast of St Francis of Assisi.**

► **Create Easter gardens or gardens using plants specifically mentioned in the bible with school children.**

Mission & Learning in Creation

To strive to safeguard the integrity of Creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth is one of the five marks of Mission & Evangelism for the Anglican Communion. We are empowered by the Spirit to proclaim the Good News of God in the Risen Christ for all Creation, and to nurture people in the church and community through learning, encouraging vocations to ministry and transforming

Key texts: Isaiah 49,1-6; 55,1-11; Psalm 19, 7-14; Matthew 6,25-34, 13,18-23; 2 Timothy 3,14-4,5.

society through knowledge of the presence of God, wonder at his work in Creation and responsible use of the skills he gives to humankind for its stewardship.

In debating, planning and delivering training for laity and clergy in the diocese, the Board of Ministry sees learning about God's gifts in Creation and our stewardship of the earth as part of waiting upon the will of God through this life and beyond.

Our Board of Education works to serve all schools and learning agencies, to encourage wonder at, understanding of and responsibility for the natural world through the National Curriculum and school activities.

► **Encourage preachers in your parish to give serious attention to Creation and find opportunity to discuss their sermons with them. Use the set lections at Harvest and Rogationtide to challenge and nourish your own thinking and prayers and how your family or community live.**

► **Devote a parish study group to discussing key biblical texts on Creation and stewardship, the teaching of the Church and the environmental challenges facing society at the present time.**

► **Make sure you know about the opportunities for learning about environmental responsibility in the Diocesan training programme and in local Adult Education and Lifelong Learning programmes. Offer what skills you have yourself for sharing your own knowledge about the natural world and the wise use of resources**

► **Use your church as a location for a wider discussion among local Christians and others about the natural world and the environmental crises.**



► **Encourage your local school to adopt its own environmental policy and to give concern for Creation a higher profile in its activities, both inside school and out.**

Taking Care of God's Creation

In the biblical account of Creation, humankind is given stewardship of all that God has made – a privilege and responsibility which falls upon each one of us. Lording it over Creation - exploiting resources selfishly, destroying species, short-cutting natural processes, even turning nature into some sort of 'experience' or entertainment - this is always done at a certain cost, though the accounts may not be settled for some time. Engaging with nature in these places where wonder and need collide can be a dirty and exhausting task yet, for the Church, this should be a religious experience: through it, we can discover a divine concern for both nature and us together.

The Anglican Church in Blackburn Diocese accepts its share in working out the practicalities of stewardship, within its committees and organisations, in the cathedral, parishes and church schools and among its Christian people. These commitments apply to the land, buildings and belongings of the church, its financial operations and campaigns and to corporate and individual lifestyles among its members. In particular, we recognise the following challenges.

Land, biodiversity and the built environment

In the biblical traditions, the land is an unearned gift from God, the place where he meets his people and where they have a shared history together. Yet, often, we give the land no rest and God's kingdom is not built by what we construct there. God gave humankind the privilege of naming all his creatures, yet often we call them to do our will, forgetful of their beauty and wider place in nature. Food and drink are blessings of Creation and a shared meal lies at the heart of our worship, yet much food production is corrupt, and water wasted.

Key texts: Genesis 1,27-31; 2,19-20; 28,13-15; Exodus 16; Deuteronomy 6,10-15; 26,1-11; Leviticus 25,1-7; Amos 8,4-6;

► **Make sure that existing faith buildings and any new developments**

on church land have a minimal impact on the environment. Use the diocesan environmental audit procedure for all aspects of your church life and worship.

► **Help carry out surveys of species and habitats on church land and within your parish and sign up as a partner in a Local Agenda 21 programme; plant indigenous sustainable trees and shrubs on church land; stop using inorganic fertilisers and pesticides in church grounds and graveyards; celebrate biodiversity through hosting an 'Apple Day' or 'Potato Day' (see www.commonground.org); recycle church waste through composting and wormeries.**

► **Be responsible in your congregation's use of natural resources: implement metering if this saves water; reduce external spotlighting to make your church a beacon of responsible use of electricity; cut down your use of paper and packaging; recycle household goods, mobile phones & printer cartridges, furniture, and clothes, use Fairtrade and organic products in church shops and refectories.**

► **Consider offering any redundant land for community use as part of a partnership 'green space' project, maybe with a local school or in ways that bring together old and young so that experience of God's Creation can be passed from generation to generation**

► **Think how you could use any land attached to faith buildings as a place for meditation, healing and learning about faithful dependence upon God's Creation. The Quiet Garden Trust (www.quietgardn.co.uk) is a Christian charity that provides ideas and inspiration about the provision of space for silence, reflection and prayer. Apart from cemetery and church yard other examples of faith-gardens are for healing and medicinal; as journey or penitential labyrinth; as a memorial; to proclaim peace; for growing vines; and as wildflower gardens.**



Finance, investment and social enterprise

Renewal is at the heart of the Christian experience, yet much of what we use from Creation is wasted and the real cost of resources, made materials and processes is

often improperly accounted. Human ingenuity and skills are gifts from God that can be used to do business with the earth and earn a living from it but only where justice is done – justice to the earth itself, to employees and customers and to the future we conceive in our enterprises.

Key texts: Deuteronomy 68,1-10; Kings 21; Amos 8,4-6; Luke 12,16-31; Acts 2,42-47; II Corinthians 9,6-15; I Timothy 6,6-10

In its stewardship of financial resources to secure the training and sustaining of ministry, for building and maintaining churches and for buying and selling parsonages and the Church's other property, the Board of Finance aims to

maintain the highest ethical finance and investment standards, aware of its wider responsibility to sustain the fabric of Creation and the challenge of establishing the kingdom of God.

- ▶ **Aim to manage your parish and personal finances using a bank and advisers that are explicitly committed to investment with an environmental ethic.**
- ▶ **Promote complete transparency in your parish and personal financial dealings, using open tendering for any works or services provided and looking for businesses which have a proven record of environmental care.**
- ▶ **Consider carefully those schemes which claim to offset environmental damage by some sort of trading in such things as 'carbon credits' or to offer tax benefits by investment in environmental enterprises.**
- ▶ **Look at ways in which your congregation can support social enterprise developments - not-for-profit businesses that aim to provide sustainable ventures, to include groups marginalised by society and give a strong environmental lead. through recycling, local sourcing and energy-saving. Consider offering church buildings and land for such enterprises.**
- ▶ **Support the establishment of FERN (Faith Enterprises Restoring Neighbourhoods), a proposed new diocesan initiative working in partnership with local groups to capitalise on the church's potential for using our buildings and people for environmentally-friendly enterprises.**

Climate change & energy

In the history of God dealing's with us, our neglect of his gifts has been seen as a judgement on his people. Climate change presents an unprecedented challenge for all the peoples of the earth to take account of our misuse of Creation and make amends. We believe that the Church should play its own part in this response and that it has some particular contributions to make.

Our weather varies naturally over the long term but most scientists now agree that human activity, particularly the burning of fossil fuels through the industrial age, has caused substantial rises in those gases in the earth's atmosphere which affect climate. Current thinking predicts global increases in temperature with shifts in

Key texts: Genesis 9,8-17; Isaiah 52,7-10; Matthew 13,24-30; Romans 13,11-14; I Thessalonians 5,1-11

rainfall patterns, sea-level rise and more violent extreme weather events.

Though effects may be more threatening elsewhere on earth, the UK will experience changes of its own. If

you want further information on what climate change means for us, see the www.climatechallenge.gov.uk website.

Blackburn Diocese fully endorses the Church of England's response to climate change, *Shrinking the Footprint*. We are therefore involved in regional initiatives and partnerships supporting our parishes and individuals in their responses through faith, practice and mission. You can read more of this national campaign on www.shrinkingthefootprint.cofe.anglican.org and get inspiration and ideas for you and your congregation from *How many Lightbulbs does it Take to Change a Christian?* available from Church House Publishing at £4.99.



► **'Measuring our Footprint' is the first step for the diocese and its parishes and for all Christians in the North-West in reducing our energy consumption.**

This simple questionnaire and audit enables you to see how heavy a mark you make upon the earth in terms of heating, lighting, insulation and transport. Check now that your parish or faith group has completed this audit and download a copy for you and your own household from the Diocesan web site at www.blackburn.anglican.org.

► **Think first about increased efficiency of any buildings, equipment and services you and your parish use. You can do 'something for nothing' by reducing the use of materials and services costly to you and to the environment: for example, turn down heating, switch unused equipment off, change to a greener service-provider for heat and light, integrate your transport needs for worship and meetings.**

► **Then, with any new investments, you and your parish need to carefully consider the wider environmental costs of your actions and weigh the possible longer-term savings for future generations of parishioners. Look at Low Carbon Building Project grants and Combined Heat & Power installations.**

► **Remember that the food you buy affects energy consumption and contributes to human impacts on climate. Be discerning about more damaging things like the 'air-miles' needed to bring you what you like to eat.**

► **Air and road travel are among the most damaging of our impacts on the climate. Take care of what you pass by and tread upon and make responsible travelling part of your pilgrimage of life.**

► **Through preaching, prayer and education in the parish, you should raise wider awareness of the possible impacts of human selfishness among others outside your immediate Christian community. For example, our coastal parishes and those in major river valleys of the diocese are likely to be more affected by sea-level rise and storm events. Beyond this country, huge areas of the earth and their peoples are likely to be affected by drought and flooding in future years. Act for them now, as well as praying for justice to them and all Creation.**

Securing the future together

In Blackburn Diocese, we share God's Creation with other churches, people of other faiths and none, and with many organisations committed to understanding and caring for the environment. As responsible citizens, all of us are bound by environmental legislation and challenged by our government's own commitments to sustainability, nationally and for our North-West region. The present government's approach to this is summed up in the term 'Securing the Future' and in Blackburn diocese we are committed to working in partnership with others to secure a future we can share.

At the same time, it is not the Church's vocation to acquiesce dumbly in the way the world, or our government, thinks the environment should be treated. Rather, the Church must itself present a prophetic challenge to government and ask what sort of future God has in store for his people, and for his whole Creation.

► **The Lund Principle commits the Anglican Church to not doing apart what can be done together with other Christians. In working with other denominations, you can**

use the *Creation Care Toolkit* available free from Ecocongregations (www.ecocongregations.org). This ecumenical initiative, managed in England by A Rocha (www.arocha.org), aims to help churches make the link

Key texts: Leviticus 25,35-38; Deuteronomy 24,19-22; Micah 4,1-5; Luke 10,29-37; Mark 10,42-45; John 4,8-15;

between Christian faith and environmental issues. As well as 12 modules on such questions as worship, bible study, buildings, lifestyle, it produces a regular newsletter and events list.

► **In working with other faiths, one model for commitment and action is provided by *Operation Eden*, a multi-faith environmental initiative of Liverpool Diocese, whose primary objective is to 'support people of faith to work with people of good will to transform local environments whilst focusing on sustainable development and social inclusion' (www.operation-eden.org.uk).**

► **Think creatively about things which different faiths hold in common: use of faith land for religious and spiritual expression and for burials; the celebration of Creation and the seasons; the spiritual significance and symbolic power of animals and plants. These offer ways of talking and acting together for the benefit of all society and for the establishment of justice and peace through all Creation.**

