

Motion passed by Reading, Witney and Bracknell deanery synods

That this Synod, affirming the fifth mark of mission (“to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth”), concerned by the scientific evidence that climate change is proceeding at a rapid rate and by the impact of climate events:

- a) urges the Oxford Diocesan Synod and the General Synod of the Church of England to declare a Climate Emergency;
- b) urges the Diocese of Oxford, the General Synod and all Anglican leaders to speak out about climate change and its impacts;
- c) urges the Diocese of Oxford, the General Synod and the National Investment Bodies of the Church of England to work to achieve year-on-year reductions consonant with a target of reaching 70% cuts by 2030 and net zero by 2035, or as soon thereafter as is possible;
- d) urges the National Investment Bodies of the Church of England and the Church Commissioners to prioritise investment in renewable energy, and that appropriate committees prioritise creation care in their administrative processes;
- e) urges Anglican leaders to further develop pre- and post-ordination and lay training to deepen understanding in how care for the earth is part of our Christian faith and a missional imperative;
- f) urges Anglican leaders and all Christians to seek to support the poorest in the world who are suffering the most from the impacts of climate change, in the awareness that our nation has been among those who have benefited most from the emissions that has caused the crisis;
- g) commends all Christians to consider their individual responsibilities and how they may change and engage in actions that care for creation;
- h) commits to pray earnestly and regularly about the climate crisis: for all peoples to value God’s earth and its creatures and for urgent action by individuals, communities and nations to act to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Why the deaneries brought their motions

For Reading, the motivation for the motion was that they wanted to make sure we could make a real difference and to do so as a church community – people were keen that we responded in a way that went beyond reducing plastic and recycling.” . There was a clear mandate that our stewardship over the earth, and love of our neighbour, requires more from us. The deanery synod recognised that some actions would be more difficult to work out how to do than others, and that some would just be hard full-stop! But through careful thought and planning in conjunction with many different stakeholders, we believe that we could come up with solutions that would support the life of the church, and not just become a burden on clergy.

For Witney, there was a genuine sense that this is a very serious matter that needs responding to. Some churches in the deanery have already been engaged in creation care in several different ways including through Eco Church and A Rocha. There was an awareness that personal lifestyle will need to change and that this might be challenging. There were also questions that highlighted the need for a diocesan response beyond that which any individual parish could make: how will small rural churches manage the potential cost of becoming carbon neutral (there was interest in energy audits for church buildings and to think about how often churches are used and how best to use them)? How can we enable easy access to practical advice on: car-sharing, switching to green energy suppliers, where there are electric charging points, house insulation, what our area is doing about recycling etc.? How do we support the farming community at a time of transition in eating habits (eating less meat is not a popular message in rural communities as it threatens livelihoods)? How do we work with local councils to support rural communities in dealing with transport questions, at a time where, for many, public transport is no longer an option? Overall there was a realistic sense that it would be a challenge to make the changes needed, and that rural communities would need significant support for this. Substantial financial investment and a major education programme will be needed to take things forward effectively and this must become a priority.

For Bracknell, there was real passion in the room, especially from some of our younger members, when this motion was debated in Bracknell's deanery synod. There was a strong sense that we are at a Kairos moment and that the only way for the Church to be authentically Christ-like at this time was to speak the truth--regardless of how difficult that truth is. We were in no doubt that this will not be an easy task and that we will have to re-examine both how we do church and our own individual discipleship. As many of our parishes enjoy international links with parishes in developing nations, who are already suffering from the changing climate, there was a strong sense that declaring a climate emergency is a duty we owe to the wider Body of Christ.

Please note that minor amendments will be proposed at Diocesan Synod (having been discussed in advance with representatives of the three deaneries) to slightly adjust the wording to make it fully suitable as a statement by Diocesan Synod and as a motion to be considered by General Synod; and to take account of the motion recently passed by General Synod.