

# FAITH IN OUR FUTURE



**Diocesan Vision Course**

**Diocese of Monmouth**  
The Church in Wales

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# Where next?

## Introduction

With the launch of the Diocesan Vision in October 2022, we are pushing a restart button in some ways for the life of the Diocese. That doesn't mean the life had stopped and it certainly doesn't mean that we're rejecting the wonderful work that has been done and continues to be done, but it does mean another chance to focus on a new vision, one that will help to shape our mission as a diocese over the next 5 years and beyond.

What is very clear is that the Vision isn't about survival of our churches, but about growth. It is about doing whatever we do for God well. It's about recognising the messages that we are entrusted with. Those messages contained in the vision are about:

### Discipleship

Deepening our everyday faith and **growing more like Jesus**

### Stewardship

Recognising God's love and gifts and **living as thankful and generous people**

### Social Justice

Thinking about what is right and **serving together to strengthen our communities**

### Equality and Diversity

Living out God's love and **welcoming all**

### Environment

Considering our impact on the environment and **caring for God's creation**

The "5 Branches" course released after Easter 2022 looked at those subjects in a broad way, and this course now looks in a bit more detail at some of the practical aspects that concern us. It also looks back at questions posed to Diocesan Conference members back in October 2021. Obviously, this was a survey of a relatively small group, but they are a group that represent churches throughout the Diocese and it is interesting to reflect on their answers and the answers that anyone in our churches might give.

If you'd like to read the full 5 Themes report this can be found at:

<https://monmouth.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/visioning-resources/>



The Diocesan Vision is about growth and it's about recognising how God can give that growth if we are faithful and trusting, seeking his will and trying to follow it in whatever we do. That growth begins with us and our desire to share the gospel message, but we're not alone in this. Apart from the crucial presence of God, we also have each other - to pray together, to talk together, to reflect on the bible together. And we have the church, a place where we and others join in worship and praise, in prayer and reflection. A place where joys and sorrows can be shared amongst 'family', and a place of encouragement. Of course, very importantly, the church is also a place from which we are to go out and share our faith with others through our words and actions.

Most of us who've been part of a church for a long time will know that church isn't simply the place where people come and sit miserably for an hour or so before getting on with the rest of their lives, but that is sadly still the perception of some people. However, whilst we may appreciate our place in the church, there are surely few of us that don't occasionally wish it could be better, or different. Perhaps we hope it could be:

- more vibrant
- better organised or structured for mission
- a place of lifelong learning and growing in our faith
- a centre of the community, making a real difference in community
- a place where people depend on God who has given everything for us and who, day by day, continues to provide for us.

The 5 Branches of our Vision are things that impact every one of us, and have the potential to impact our communities and much further afield. We are, with God's help, people that can help to make this happen!

The Church in Wales catechism is something that isn't particularly well known now, but in this summary of belief and values are the following words:

*'The Church in Wales carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members' and 'The mission of the church is to be the instrument of God in restoring all people to unity with God and each other in Christ'.*

As we rebuild confidence in our churches, and as we seek to rebuild, renew and refresh ourselves and congregations everywhere, we have a wonderful opportunity today to be part of a church that is not fearful for the future, but confident in our ideas and vision for growth and above all, in God who accompanies us wherever we are.



## How do we do this course?

The easiest answer is to follow the sessions in the way that suits you! However, we can also offer a few ideas.

We suggest that each session begins with opening worship. There is an example which can be used or you can create your own.

Each session begins with the poll question asked at diocesan conference in October 2021. Have a think about the answers to that and where you might be now on the question.

The session then moves into a Bible reading and then some commentary and questions. If you get chance, it would be good to familiarise yourself with this material prior to the session.

There is then a section about where this might lead us now. In this we share some reflections from comments that have been made at the Diocesan Conference 2021 and in other places. These are ideas – you will have your own as well!

Towards the end of each session, there is a final question about any specific action points. You may want to discuss this in your group, or you might just want to think about it on your own and feed back your thoughts later. We hope this course will be practical, beginning to put in place ideas that will happen in your ministry areas but there's no hard and fast rules. What will work well in some places might not in others!

The session then ends with closing worship (again there is an example which can be used or you can create your own).

If you're meeting together in person, or following the sessions online, being together is a really important element of these discussions. Have a cup of tea (or something similar!) and get to know one another a bit better. In the discussions recognise that we're all on a journey together, be willing to listen, willing to share and willing to grow in your faith.

Above all, enjoy it!

## Thanks

*To those who have helped with putting together this course especially Revd Canon Rebecca Stevens who has helped me in putting together the sessions.*

**Ian Rees**  
**Archdeacon of Monmouth**  
**Diocesan Director of Ministry & Discipleship**



# Session 1

## Growing more like Jesus



### Opening worship

(Example at the back or you may wish to create your own)

### Poll Question

*Below is the question asked at the 2021 Diocesan Conference.*

***Do you see yourself as an active disciple or as a church-goer?***

*86% replied active disciple / 14% replied church-goer*

*What does this say to you? Is it the answer you'd expect?*

### Bible Passage and Reflection

#### ***Bible verse:***

*And Jesus said to them, "Follow me". And immediately they left their nets and followed him*

**Mark 1:17,18**

#### ***Commentary:***

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee he approached Simon and his brother Andrew. We don't really know to what extent Jesus was known to the fishermen but we can see their reaction and commitment to his call to follow him. We all have hopes and expectations in our lives, some of which are fulfilled, some are not. The early disciples must have had similar hopes and expectations and must have surely experienced a 'roller coaster' on their journey with Jesus.

Their journey wasn't easy, prior to the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus and beyond that. Our journey as disciples will often contain 'ups and downs' but we are called to remain faithful to that call of Jesus who invites us to follow him.

As individuals and as a church our own response to that call is one part of that consideration, but we are also called to share our faith with others. We are to be witness to Jesus, who has transformed us.



We do that in our gathering together in worship; we do it as we seek to grow more like Jesus as we try to understand his will and purpose for us and we do it as we go out in the power of the Spirit, boldly and confidently proclaiming good news for all people.

- 1) What were Simon and Andrew expecting as they left their nets to follow Jesus?
- 2) What did they see that made them react so quickly?
- 3) How does the eagerness to 'follow Jesus' relate to our Ministry Areas?
- 4) What do we need, in spiritual terms, to allow our lives, and the lives of others, to be transformed by Jesus?

## Where does this lead us?

Practical examples given at the Diocesan Conference (2021) suggested the following things:

Establishing what discipleship means to us.

Current inward focuses included:

- Sermons
- Home groups, Bible studies, corporate prayer
- Courses
- Reflection, study of scripture, sacraments
- Inviting people to specific ministry when gifts are presented

Current outward focuses included:

- Supporting charities/foodbanks
- Courses (such as Alpha for example)
- Life Events (baptisms, weddings, funerals)
- Welcoming people
- Being an example in the community
- Work in schools

General focuses included:

- Giving support and walking alongside people; offering strength to those seeking
- Having a clear point of contact
- Recognise different stages of the faith journey
- Encouragement to be the person God calls you to be – use your unique gifts

Are these the sort of things you expect to see in your Ministry Area?

What is there already that we should be celebrating/ continuing to develop?

Do we reflect enough on our opportunities to share the gospel and seek growth?





## Just a thought and a question for reflection!

*Being a Christian is not essentially about joining a church or being a nice person, but about following in the footsteps of Jesus, taking his teachings seriously, letting his Spirit take the lead in our lives and in so doing helping to change the world from our nightmare into God's dream.*

***Crazy Christians – Michael Curry***

Michael Curry is the Presiding Bishop for the Episcopal Church in the United States. In this quote he's not advocating an abandonment of church, but that the church of today and tomorrow should be full of people 'following in the footsteps of Jesus'. Is that the church we are part of? If not, what is preventing that?

## Any specific action points?

Is there anything or things that you think can be started or done now?

## Closing Worship

(Example at the back or you may wish to create your own)



# Session 2



Living as thankful and generous people

## Opening Worship

(Example at the back or you may wish to create your own)

## Poll Question

**Stewardship is mostly about money?**

4% replied yes / 96% replied no

*What does this say to you? Is it the answer you'd expect?*

## Bible passage and reflection

### **Bible verse:**

*Jesus said, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?"*

**Luke 14:28**

### **Commentary:**

Jesus is telling his listeners about the cost of discipleship. This verse is preceded by Him telling the people that 'whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple'. It is essential that all of us know the cost of our discipleship. In this country that can sometimes be hard to identify. We do not live under the threat of persecution and we do not have to pay a particularly heavy price for our faith. And yet, evidence would suggest that the church is strongest in places where it is most challenged.

Though we live in a relatively comfortable society with a high degree of religious freedom perhaps there are times when we need to take up the cross. It may be in financial commitments, it may be in time, in reading and studying the bible, making more room in our lives for prayer...



As individuals and as churches it is important that we plan for mission and ministry recognising the requirements of our own commitment to God, who has given us everything. How will we respond?

Recognising and using the gifts God has given us is important. What are our gifts? Similarly recognising the gifts of others is important and sensitively encouraging them to use those gifts might be just what they're waiting for.

One of the gifts we have is each other. Being together as God's people is important. There are days and times when we perhaps don't feel like going to church, or we make arrangements to do something else. Sometimes that is inevitable and necessary but any gathering of God's people is missing something if you are not there.

We grow more like Jesus as we commit ourselves to a lifelong journey of getting to know him better. It takes time and effort, just as it does in the building of any relationship, but there is no relationship more life transforming and rewarding. That transformation will inevitably help us to recognise the gifts we have and to use those gifts excitedly and passionately to tell others about the life transforming relationship that is possible with Jesus.

There is a cost for us in that and we must measure that cost, bearing in mind always that we measure it against the things Jesus has done for us.

- 1) What does 'carrying the cross' mean for us today? How does this apply to us as a ministry area?
- 2) God has given us everything. What can we give in return?
- 3) What are our best resources as a ministry area? How can we use them best/ develop them?
- 4) What will be our costs?  
(This doesn't mean working out a literal budget now! Costs are not just financial)

## Where does this lead us?

These are some of the comments raised by Diocesan Conference members

It is acknowledged that money is a crucial element to continuing to serve in our mission; however, it was raised that there is a need to be more transparent and honest about the costs of running churches.

Clergy can be hesitant in discussing money as it can feel like a justification of their stipend from the pulpit.

The practice of tithing was raised in several groups with varying views. Some feel that the practice of tithing or giving 10% should be fundamental while others acknowledge this is not



possible for some individuals. Other groups raised that an individual's giving is now often spread across multiple charities.

There was discussion about the challenge of being narrow-minded in respect of money and only focusing on the bills without thought to investment in mission.

A number of people raised the issue that asking for money is very off-putting to new members of the congregation.

Apart from giving financially, some of the other ways we can give were generally summarised as time, abilities, resources, leadership, and prayer.

It was noted that the value of volunteers is sometimes unnoticed, and that volunteering is a potential means to developing deeper discipleship. When people are asked to take part by volunteering, they are drawn closer into the church community and the Christian culture of serving. It is felt that we should invest in this alternative form of stewardship as part of our church culture. Calling is not always spiritual in nature, and we should look for ways to display faith to God in our whole lives.

*Do you agree with some or all of these comments?*

*What do they mean practically in our Ministry Area? In our church? In our lives?*

## Just a thought and a question for reflection!

*The purpose of creation is joy. In a world where we are often made to feel that the purpose of life is work, production, success, wealth or a host of other things, to be reminded that we are here in the fullest sense to enjoy God, ourselves and the creation is a huge relief, and a reminder that our selves are to be enjoyed in Christ, not to be taken too seriously. We are here for the glory of God, which shines most clearly when we enjoy him and his creation to the full.*

**Graham Tomlin – The Widening Circle**

How often in church life do we get distracted from what is really important in our churches and in our spiritual lives. Indeed, do we know what is really important? Surely it is a relationship with God that changes us day by day. When we spend so much time thinking of what we're able to give in terms of time, talent or money to the church, should we not be considering whether there is anything we can't afford to give to God who gives us everything?



## Any specific action points?

Is there anything or things that you think can be started or done now?

## Closing worship

(Example at the back or you may wish to create your own)



# Session 3



Serving together to  
strengthen our communities

## Opening worship

(Example at the back or you may wish to create your own)

## Poll Question

**Do you feel that your church is active in promoting and delivering social justice?**

56% replied yes / 44% replied no

*What does this say to you? Is it the answer you'd expect?*

## Bible passage and reflection

### ***Bible verse:***

*'Jesus asked him, "Which of the three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He answered, "The one who showed him mercy". Jesus said, "Go and do likewise"*

**Luke 10:36,37**

### ***Commentary:***

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the best known of the biblical parables. It reminds us of the need to care for others in whatever situation, whoever they may be. We, like the Samaritan, may be called into positions which seem difficult or even alien to us, but we are called to recognise in all those around us something of the image of God.

As we gather as God's people, we are challenged to consider who is missing from our gathering, and why? As we seek to grow more like Jesus, we must be aware of the fact that he will probably not be just like us or how we want him to be! Growing like Jesus implies a willingness to be transformed and to see in others something of Jesus. And as we go out, we go into communities seeking to be at the heart of those communities and seeking to play a part with the power of the Spirit in building those communities for the good of all.



- 1) In what ways does your church currently engage with the local community?
- 2) How aware of local needs are you and your local congregation? Are there particular projects needed, or projects you should be involved in?
- 3) Who do we see as the 'marginalised' in society today and how do we respond to their needs?
- 4) Does the church have a 'public voice' in your community? If not, in what ways can this happen?

## Where does this lead us?

These are some of the comments raised by Diocesan Conference members

Why is it important for churches to be involved in social justice issues?

The overriding answer to this was that this is simply what the Gospel is all about and is fundamental to the teachings of Jesus.

A group at the conference said that although it can be scary to become involved in politics, this is an essential aspect to addressing social justice - particularly if we are to "become a voice for the voiceless".

Another group stated that while the church has treated the symptoms of social injustice with food banks, it is necessary to address the root problem of poverty. There was a shared thread throughout the groups that our faith should make a difference to our actions and this taps into its holistic nature. It was agreed this is a public expression of God's love for each of us.

Many Christians do a lot of work for social justice through things like charity work, work with foodbanks, helping with reading in schools, helping with children and youth organisations etc. How important is it that we (as a church) show what we're doing as part of our Christian witness?

While many agreed charity work is part of their Christian duty, it was expressed that we should talk about our faith wherever possible. The expression of faith helps demark 'Christian Ministry' from 'Humanitarianism'. The importance of prayer to our work was also raised.

Looking forward, it was agreed that churches need to engage with communities to show our interest in them. This work needs to be clearly rooted in faith and not guilt. If we are not able to help directly, churches can still engage by signposting to others or offering support to other charities through fundraising, volunteers, and venue space. It was felt that this engagement should be on a local level as a local church can best respond to local issues.

Do you agree with some or all of these comments?

What do they mean practically in our Ministry Area? In our church? In our lives?



## Just a thought and a question for reflection!

William Booth ended his last ever public address in the Royal Albert Hall on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1912 with these words:

*'While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while little children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight. I'll fight to the very end'.*

Britain of 100 years ago was very different to the country we know today, but need still exists – sometimes in the same way, sometimes in new ways. What is our commitment as a church to 'fighting' for a better world, and how do we show that commitment?

## Any specific action points?

Is there anything or things that you think can be started or done now?

## Closing worship

(Example at the back or you may wish to create your own)





# Session 4



## Welcoming all

### Opening Worship

(Example at the back or you may wish to create your own)

### Poll Question

**Are we truly welcoming as a church?**

47% replied yes / 53% replied no

*What does this say to you? Is it the answer you'd expect?*

### Bible passage and reflection

#### ***Bible verse:***

*Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"*

**Matthew 28:19**

#### ***Commentary:***

We have thought in previous sessions about what a vibrant church or ministry area might look like. It will certainly be a church where everyone is welcome. We thought in session 1 of the call of Jesus to Simon and Andrew, "Follow me". As we seek to make Jesus 'attractive' to people we often need to strip away some of the things we enjoy. That might be in worship or simply in the way we present 'our church'. The former Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple famously said, 'the Church is the only organisation that exists for the benefit of its non-members.'

Mission must be at the heart of what we do as a church. We are not entitled to preserve a club or an institution for our own enjoyment. When Jesus left this 'Great Commission' he was encouraging us to seek ways of telling others about him and his love for them. It is a huge responsibility but one we are not to ignore, but it is also a huge privilege. We are entrusted with life transforming news for people!



Nobody belongs to the perfect church, and to an extent it is probably true that geographical locations and areas will shape our worshipping communities but that doesn't mean we can be complacent and just forget about those who are missing.

If we are to reach out to everyone as a church, one of the questions we need to answer is 'Who is missing from our churches now?'. Once we begin to find those answers we need to plan and organise mission effectively – it doesn't just happen. The most successful churches of all are where mission is at the heart of what they do, but one thing all such churches have in common is a plan for growth, spiritually and numerically.

When we gather as God's people we are called to think in a missional way. As we worship and as we meet in other contexts, we are to celebrate the 'mission' that has brought us to faith. As we seek to grow more like Jesus we are to pray and seek strength and wisdom to know how we can reflect more of his life and love throughout our lives and as we go out in the power of the Spirit, we are to go with a confidence that we can help to transform lives and communities through the power of the Spirit working in and through us.

- 1) If welcoming all is to be at the heart of the life of our churches/ ministry areas, will they look different from how they look at the moment? If so, in what ways?
- 2) The Message Bible translates the beginning of this verse as 'God authorised and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life...' In what ways are we being 'trained' as disciples and what do we need to be in a position to 'train' others?
- 3) Do we know who is missing from our churches? Do we know why? How can we find out?

## Where does this lead us?

These are some of the comments raised by Diocesan Conference members

*Could we do more to welcome 'everyone' into the church? Examples?*

Responses to this question were varied with regard to suggested actions, but the unanimous answer to the prompt was 'YES' we can do more. It was felt that the homophobia, racism, sexism, and other biases (unconscious or otherwise) need to be addressed in order to move forward.

It was recognised that it is difficult to provide a space of welcome to both sides; particularly those with strong views. The need to see Christ in others; including those with contrasting views was highlighted. Specific details on the nature of these disagreements were not included in the feedback, but there were some vague references to more liberal versus more conservative views. Based on these references, I can infer that this challenge to be welcoming is felt by both sides.

In following the lessons of Christ, the need to walk with the marginalised and identify who they are today was raised.



Some proposed that the church should combat its presentation as an “exclusive club” by addressing internal power struggles, attitudes towards new people, and toxic gossip. Solutions to these issues included preaching on inclusivity, prayer, one-to-one listening and conversations, inviting those on the margins to work with us towards change, using house groups or other small groups to enable connections, and providing education on topics – including services (what we do and why).

*How does or can the realisation that we are all Children of God change our view of ourselves and others?*

Responses to this discussion question could be divided into two categories; those who interpreted the concept as active and those who saw it as passive.

Responses within the former group suggested we should amend our treatment of others to mirror that of God – recognising each other’s unique value and delighting in the diversity of humanity and the presence of God in each of us. This response implies that we should review the way we ourselves interact with others and actively appreciate diversity.

Within the active change mindset, the conversations of two groups focused on an awareness that our culture has become quite self-centred with a focus on ‘my church’, ‘my God’, and ‘my faith’. This can only be addressed if we stop insisting on our own views and start actively listening to others.

The latter group of responses placed trust in God to change the hearts of others and to let love grow. It was suggested that the success of God’s influence is reflected in the continued learning within the Church.

It was agreed across all the groups that this is a fundamental element of Christian faith and should have a dramatic effect on our theological thinking.

*Do you agree with some or all of these comments?*

*What do they mean practically in our Ministry Area? In our church? In our lives?*

## Just a thought and a question for reflection!

*It should break our hearts that often we (the church) are known more for what we are against than what we are for, for who we have excluded than for who we have embraced. That’s not what people thought of when they met Jesus.*

***Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo – Red Letter Christians***

There can surely be very few things that are as ‘off-putting’ as rules and constitutions, and yet we need rules and constitutions to maintain a large organisation. So where do rules, doctrines and structures get in the way of sharing a gospel message that is ultimately ‘good news’ for everyone?



## Any specific action points?

Is there anything or things that you think can be started or done now?

## Closing worship

(Example at the back or you may wish to create your own)



# Session 5

## Caring for God's creation



### Opening Worship

(Example at the back or you may wish to create your own)

### Poll Question

**Can the church play a part in affecting climate change?**

97% replied yes / 3% replied no

*What does this say to you? Is it the answer you'd expect?*

### Bible passage and reflection

#### **Bible verse:**

*'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."*



*But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents.*

**Matthew 25:14-28**

### **Commentary:**

Whilst Greta Thunberg may have brought the climate crisis to the attention of the world's media, environmental stewardship is not a new concern for Christians.

In the Parable of the Talents Jesus compares God to the Master of a farm and his followers to the Stewards of that farm. The parable concentrates on how the stewards handle the financial wealth of the master but we know in the real world the responsibility of a good farm steward goes beyond just ensuring that the bills are paid, the books balance and the farm is profitable. Equally important are the tasks of maintaining the farm, looking after the fields and flocks, keeping the buildings and land in good working order, ensuring the workers are well treated and paid so that they work efficiently.

This analogy calls us to look beyond what we give and reflect on how we live. It challenges us to carry out our business and day to day lives responsibly, in a manner which will cause our Master to say "You good and faithful servant".

It calls us to take into account the impact our lifestyles have on our environment: are we wasteful of the resources given to us by God; do we turn the lights off when we leave a room, do we turn up the heating or put a jumper on; are the products we purchase sustainably sourced?

Do we care for God's creation or needlessly pollute it? Do we seek ease and comfort driving in our private cars or use public transport and walk whenever possible?

Do we moderate our consumption?

Do we consider how our work and business transactions affect the lives of others?

Do we use our purchasing power to ensure that the producers receive a fair reward for their work? Do we shun companies that use unsafe and exploitative labour practices? Do we support fairtrade initiatives and companies with high ethical standards?

Does the way we relate with our friends, families and society reflect the standards and values of Christ?

This approach to the environment is challenging. It takes us out of our comfort zones and leads us to consider our impact on the world, those around us and those who we will never meet.

It's a difficult task, but we are not alone in it, as the words of an old Girl Guide prayer say: *"I cannot do it by myself, Lord Jesus, please help me."*

1. In what way does our church community help to look after the environment now?
2. What could we start to do to develop our talents and care for creation?
3. What is the biggest environmental need in your local area and how could the church play its part?



## Where does this lead us?

These are some of the comments raised by Diocesan Conference members

*What is the role of the church in affecting climate change?*

All groups agreed it was the unquestionable duty of Christians to care for creation and many related this to the previous discussion about stewardship. There were calls for direct action, particularly from senior leadership to challenge government officials on this issue. However, there was also momentum for grassroots efforts amongst our congregations and to partner with other charities who are already enabling work on the ground. The responses indicate that a double pronged approach is called for to address this responsibility from both the top at a provincial and organisational level and the bottom at an individual and local level. Most groups agreed that the time for 'talking' is over and action is now needed.

It was stressed by a number of groups that this is a key focus of youth, but it was noted by one group that Covid has provided an opportunity for those from all generations to reconnect with nature. Based on the feedback, it can be inferred this is a topic which has clear importance and relevance to many. Suggestions for tackling the issue ranged from education on the issues, to personal changes in habits, and eco-friendly churches. There was a large focus on buildings in many of the groups. Some suggestions were manageable at a diocesan level, such as requests for the inclusion of eco-friendly advice in quinquennial inspections; while others would require provincial support – like funding for converting older buildings to be “greener” and more energy efficient. It was noted that an 'umbrella approach' will not work as some building will never be carbon neutral; but appropriate and achievable goals could help direct change.

*The Bible says that the earth belongs to God (Ps 24.1) not to us – how does, or should, this affect our thinking and our actions?*

The feedback expressed that this is an urgent issue. As stewards of the earth, members agreed we must save it for future generations. It was added that we are the body of the Church and are custodians of creation. Two groups raised that there is a need to educate ourselves and work to persuade others to take action. Following on from the discussion in the previous question, it was suggested that as this is an important issue for young people, it might be best that we learn from them. A second suggestion is to take note of guidance and advice in the Bible – with particular attention to the agricultural year and seasons in the liturgy. This is already in practice in many rural parishes. This could be an opportunity for urban parishes to learn from them.

*Do you agree with some or all of these comments?*

*What do they mean practically in our Ministry Area? In our church? In our lives?*



## Just a thought and a question for reflection!

*'How will the legend of the age of trees  
Feel, when the last tree falls in England?  
When the concrete spreads and the town conquers  
The country's heart; when contraceptive  
Tarmac's laid where farm has faded,  
Tramline flows where slept a hamlet,  
And shop-fronts, blazing without a stop from  
Dover to Wrath, have glazed us over?'*

***The Future of Forestry. C.S. Lewis***

Our faith in God calls us to love and steward God's creation, which is both people and the Earth that God gave us to tend. How clearly do we/ our churches do this?

## Any specific action points?

Is there anything or things that you think can be started or done now?

## Closing worship

(Example at the back or you may wish to create your own)





# Appendix

## Suggestion for opening worship

*Perhaps a candle may be lit and/ or some music played  
Periods of silence will also be helpful*

The Lord is here

**His Spirit is with us**

We have been called

**We have been chosen**

Loving God, worthy of all praise and honour, we come to offer our worship, to be still and know that you are God

**Open our eyes to your presence**

You are all good, all holy, merciful and loving, faithful and true

**Open our eyes to your presence**

We lift up our hearts with joy, our voices in thanksgiving, our lives in adoration

**Open our eyes to your presence**

We thank you for the opportunity to pause, to take stock, and to reflect on the things in life that really matter

**Open our eyes to your presence**

We thank you that you want to teach us, speak to us and deepen our relationship with you

**Open our eyes to your presence**

Loving God, draw us closer to you, so that when we return to our homes, we may do so with renewed hope, vision, strength and faith

**Open our eyes to your presence**

A time of prayer may follow

Ending with all saying this prayer together:

**Gracious God, help us so to know that your love flows through us, reaching upwards in worship, inwards in fellowship and outwards in service, to the glory of your name. You have given your all for us, teach us to give freely in return, in the name of Christ. Amen.**



## Suggestion for closing worship

*Again, symbols such as candles may be used and music played  
Periods of silence will also be helpful*

The Lord is here

**His Spirit is with us**

In the presence of God who has called the earth and stars into being

**We stand in awe**

In the presence of God whose arms have held children

**We stand in trust**

In the presence of a God whose breath has stirred within us and caused our hearts to thirst for justice

**We stand in need**

Before you, giver of life we come in faith, in search of love and justice and wholeness

**Be with us, hear us, we pray**

A time of prayer and reflection may follow on the things we have considered

Ending with all saying these prayers together:

**Lord God, you have set before us a great hope that your kingdom will come on earth, and taught us to pray for its coming: make us ever ready to thank you for the signs of its dawning, and to pray and work for the perfect day when your will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. AMEN**

