

# **Reflections for an Action Plan for the Environment Presented to Bishop Declan Lang, Bishop for Environmental Justice, International Affairs Department CBCEW.**

## **Introduction**

*“Care for the environment is fundamental to the universal good, since the health and well-being of all life depends on a healthy environment. The full human development of every human person now and in future generations cannot be separated from the fate of the earth.”*

(The Call of Creation, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, June 2002)

The Call of Creation was written in 2002 as a response to the growing awareness of the ecological crisis we face. This is not purely a crisis of the environment but also of humanity. We recognise that the health of the natural world is directly related to our own physical and spiritual health. In the seven years since *Call of Creation* the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales has moved to the next stage of formulating a plan for implementing changes that will encourage Catholics care for the natural world.

The plan is based on work already undertaken, for example, by the National Justice and Peace Commission and a successful year-long series of events held at Clifton Cathedral in Bristol between September 2007 and October 2008. *Sound of Many Waters* encouraged people to put their faith and care for the natural world together. It involved nature talks and experiences, lectures, Lenten reflection, education days in schools on environmental issues and prayer.

This Plan for Generational Change will help people to take control over a situation that can otherwise leave us feeling disempowered and helpless. we are called to undertake an “ecological conversion”, which is rooted in re-discovering our human identity in our relationship with God, with ourselves, with the earth and each other. None of these relationships imply dominance but are based in love, respect, gratitude and humility. There are many choices we make each day, which have far-reaching consequences for people and the natural world. By considering how we live we can transform the sense of despair to one of hopeful action.

The challenge for this generation is to heal what might be described as a ‘split spirituality’. For many of us, God is welcome in certain situations but not in others. It is easy to see the face of God speaking to us in a sunset or a beautiful flower, but much harder to hear his voice in the stress of everyday life. Our challenge is to see God in all things and to encounter Him in all situations, physical and spiritual. God became the physical matter of the universe through Jesus Christ and through our understanding of the incarnation we can welcome justice and peace for all of creation, even though that may mean making difficult decisions about our lifestyles.

By reaching deep into our Catholic faith (such as the sacraments, which use the physicality of wheat, wine, oil, water, fire and earth), we can draw on

many aspects of faith to sustain us through a period of transition to a sustainable way of life, and we offer this Plan as a guide to begin that journey.

This plan for generational change will be offered to all dioceses in England and Wales and forms part of a worldwide effort being undertaken by the Catholic Church towards maintaining the integrity of the natural world.

Complementing this Plan will be the Plan for Generational Change from the development and humanitarian agency of the Bishops' Conference, CAFOD. Some elements of this Plan are cited in the following pages with appropriate web links.

*His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory*

Ezekiel 43:2

### **A Catholic Understanding of the Environment.**

We are at a moment of immense grace. The “environmental crisis” offers us a chance of a different future based on renewed creativity, love and compassion for all. It is a time to extend our love to all that God has created, and by doing so we will see ourselves, the world around us and God in a new and enriched way. It is wrong to think of the environment in terms of just guilt, rather we are being invited to reflect on who we are, what our role is on earth and how to go forward in a way that deepens our Christian life.

One definition of “the environment” is “the surroundings or conditions in which a person, plant or animal operates.” This is clarified because what has become a confusing term. The “environment” is where we live and what all of life depends upon. It is all-encompassing and so cannot be considered the concern of only one particular group. It is as much about peace and justice for all people and all nations as it is about the future of the natural world. “The environment” is what we are part of and not separate from. It is about food, medicine, health, raw resources, spiritual insight, and the face of God; which is immanent in every living thing as well as transcendent and Lord of all. How we live on this earth, how we use and distribute the resources it offers and how we relate to each other and to other life forms is what makes us human and defines our character.

There are four relationships we need to have in balance if we are to be fully human and live holy, creative and flourishing lives. They are our relationship with God, with our own selves, with each other and with the natural world. Each one of those relationships has to be seen in relation to the others, and if any one of them becomes distorted then we see problems arising in ourselves and the environment.

There is no doubt that this is what we are observing in our world today. Concern for the health of the natural world grows daily and we are seeing increasing signs that our over-consumption of resources, excessive use of fossil fuels and our system of use and discard is leaving the poor facing

further hardship, the vulnerable more easily exploited, species heading for extinction and a world that is facing ecological collapse.

Our relationship with the earth has become distorted at every level from global climate change through to regional problems such as water supply and desertification. When people notice through their own experience that their environment is changing – such as local birds or insects disappearing, or unexpected and severe weather events -they begin to see global problems as part of their own experience. Fear and anxiety grow and the problems seem to be unmanageable. We make a transition from freedom to fear; from a state of feeling in control to helplessness.

It is therefore timely and appropriate to consider both what practical steps can be taken to protect the natural world and to bear witness that another path of simple, holy, sustainable living is possible.

The Plan for generational change will cover seven major areas that Catholic communities can consider. These are:

1. Celebration and love of Creation
2. Education and Young People
3. Lifestyles
4. Wisdom and Guidance
5. Media and Advocacy
6. Partnerships and eco-twinning
7. Assets

## **1. Celebration of Creation**

### Celebration in Liturgy

It is easy to forget that the Earth is not a problem but a source of wonder and joy. Surrounded by the despair and depression that accompanies any reporting on the environmental crisis, it is understandable that people feel a sense of foreboding about the future. But Catholicism brings a new voice that sings praises to God for the sheer wonder of the created world and our place in it. Catholicism celebrates our human existence on earth. It teaches that we are meant to be here; we are an integral part of God's plan; we are meant to enjoy creation in all its facets and that creation allows us to learn more about God. The profound hope embodied in Christianity gives us confidence to believe that we can work towards a more just and loving future.

Building more celebration of creation into liturgy and Parish life is a fundamental start to exploring a spiritual approach to nature. The new season of Creation Time (<http://www.ecen.org/cms/index.php?page=creationtime>) is a particularly good time to begin; it encompasses Harvest Festival and St Francis Day. Music, singing, prayer and joyful praise are at the heart of caring for the earth. We suggest that more opportunity is found throughout the year to celebrate the gift of creation and that it becomes an integral part of our liturgy.

### Finding Joy in the Natural World

*"I lift up my eyes to the mountains; where is my help to come from?  
My help comes from God who made heaven and earth."*

Psalm 121

Direct experience of the natural world is part of embodying celebration into our lives and we encourage parishes to experience their local environment as part of creating change. No church or community exists in isolation, it is embedded in the natural environment that surrounds it and nuanced by the history of an area.

As part of a long term plan we encourage all to celebrate local beauty, diversity, challenges and connections. This can be done throughout the year so that seasonal changes are celebrated. These experiences could take the form of a nature walk through a local beauty spot with a guide, experiencing the dawn or evening chorus, arranging a visit to see the spectacles of nature in the local area and many other ideas.

This is particularly important as we enter 2010, the UN International Year of Biodiversity. We can contribute to protecting other life on earth through celebrating and protecting our local places and by supporting organisations that are striving to protect them.

Many of our church grounds could be enhanced by planting wildlife friendly plants, shrubs and trees; each place of worship could become a haven for all of life and inspire the local community to follow our example.

CAFOD's liturgical and worship materials can be seen in the following link:  
<http://www.cafod.org.uk/worship/environment>

*"One could say that by being in contact with nature we absorb into our own human existence the very mystery of creation which reveals itself to us through untold wealth and variety of visible beings, and which at the same time is always beckoning us towards what is hidden and invisible."*

Pope John Paul 11 Apostolic Letter 1985

## **2. Education and Young People**

*"Many young people today lack hope. They are perplexed by the questions that present themselves ever more urgently in a confusing world, and they are often uncertain which way to turn for answers. They see poverty and injustice and they long to find solutions. They are challenged by the arguments of those who deny the existence of God and they wonder how to respond. They see great damage done to the natural environment through human greed and they struggle to find ways to live in greater harmony with nature and with one another."*

Pope Benedict's message to young people on WYD 2008

### Catholic Schools and Universities

Our Catholic places of education at primary, secondary and tertiary level are greatly valued. Through the school curriculum, university courses and public outreach undertaken by these institutions they are able to imbue the next generation with deeply seated values that transcend those of purely secular interest. An essential part of this Plan for Generational Change will be to further ground our young people in spiritual ecological awareness, as well as instilling in them a sense of hope for the future.

This can be done through extending an understanding of ecological issues in religious education as well as science and geography. CAFOD has already a well established educational programme which could be further promoted and extended. Care for the earth needs to become part of work and play and each individual must be encouraged to see themselves as part of a web of life.

Encouraging local schools to actively take up green ideas and build praise for the earth into their assemblies may start a lifetime of sustainable living. All schools and universities should be encouraged to do an environmental audit and to make their grounds as friendly to wildlife as possible, encouraging all young people to grow plants and care for creatures. We must encourage children to understand the value of organic gardening and food production, the necessity of providing the right habitats for all creatures in urban spaces as well as in the countryside and to show respect for all of life. Our Catholic places of education must become places of inspiration for the future.

We encourage places of education to consider events like a time-table crash which allows a full concentration on nature and our role in protecting it. We urge all to teach recycling, re-using and reducing waste. At the heart of our education ethos is the desire to help children and young people to be fit for a life of love and service; involvement in and appreciation of nature is a deeply spiritual way to embed these values.

The centre of this initiative is the sharing of ideas and experiences between school communities. Only those who teach and run schools know what works and what does not and the sharing of this knowledge creates a strong community dedicated to caring for the environment. We therefore welcome initiatives like the *Catholic Eco-Schools Newsletter* ([www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org)) and encourage others to share their experiences.

CAFOD schools packs on environmental awareness and climate change are excellent resources for classrooms. See the following links for primary and secondary materials.

<http://www.cafod.org.uk/primary/climate-environment>

<http://www.cafod.org.uk/secondary/climate-environment>

*“Let us hope that, especially among young people, emerging interest in the environment will deepen their understanding of the proper order and*

*magnificence of God's creation of which man and woman stand at the centre and summit."*

Pope Benedict, Sept 2007

*" Education that focuses solely on the elements of science and technology cannot offer a framework of moral values to guide the daily decisions of living. We need an education that helps liberate people from enslavement to a way of life that values consumption, convenience, wealth, status and economic growth above all else, an education that begins to give them freedom to make different choices... True education involves a genuine conversion in the way we think and behave."*

The Call of Creation

### **3. Lifestyles**

The life of Christ was marked by simple holiness and as followers of Christ we too need to shed the excess and revert to a lifestyle that treads lightly on the earth and is in solidarity with the poor. There is also a strong tradition in the Catholic Church of monastic simplicity and now is the time to re-visit this tradition in all our daily lives. Simplicity, community, obedience and prayerfulness will solve many problems we face.

The CAFOD Live Simply campaign, which is supported by nearly 80 Catholic organizations, could form the basis for an extensive outreach that raises awareness amongst Catholics for the need to change lifestyles. See Link: <http://www.cafod.org.uk/worship/livesimply>

We encourage people of faith to consider many aspects of daily life and examine them in the light of Christ's life and teaching. Areas for consideration are:

Food – A good guide is the Soil Association recommended guidelines for ethical food which is to eat 70% fresh and non-processed, 50% locally sources and 30% organic. All tea and coffee served after masses or at social functions should be fair trade and supplied in washable and re-usable cups and plates. Our food should be seen as an obvious example of our commitment to fair trading and environmental sustainability.

Travel – We encourage all Catholic buildings to supply bike-racks and to have a practical and sustainable transport policy. Public transport to and from churches could be well-publicised and people encouraged to share lifts.

Energy Use – Switching to low energy appliances like light bulbs are well known and simple ways to reduce energy consumption, but more can be done by considering ethical energy suppliers and making sure everywhere is insulated.

Plastics – As much as possible the use of plastics should be phased out, especially bottles of water and unnecessary packaging. Plastics cause many problems in the natural world because of their persistence in landfill or floating at sea.

Luxury Items – All Catholics need to consider carefully what luxuries are important. Of course celebration and feasting is part of our love of life, but a

careful balance between need and greed needs to be considered carefully and in the light of faith and values.

Clothing – Many of today's cheap clothes are produced with no concern for the environment or for the people who make them. It is important for us to become aware of ethical buying and making others aware of the true cost of cheap clothing.

A simple lifestyle is not one of poverty but of restraint and finding joy outside of consumerism – it is an attitude of mind, not an impoverished way of living. All of these aspects of living can be areas of consideration and prayer.

As well as our individual lifestyles we must consider the wider aspects which can impact on us such as how is the energy we are using being generated? Are we playing our part in supporting renewable energy?

#### Lenten Observance and the Environment

Lent is a traditional time in the Christian calendar specifically set aside for personal reflection and sacrifice in order to gain spiritual insight. The gaining of greater wisdom is reflected in the symbolism of the lengthening of the days at that time of year. Lenten observance that takes into account our affect on the earth is to be widely encouraged. This is a time also to make pledges that we can act out in a concrete way; no matter how small, every act makes a difference. We encourage Catholics to support the Cafod LiveSimply campaign and Lent Family Fast Day.

#### Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a great gift to help us deal with the sins that we know we commit that harm other life and degrade the earth; and this specifically Catholic understanding of the burdensomeness of sin and how we can be liberated from it enables us to move on with a sense of peace and purpose.

*"Lately I have come to realise that my notion of sin has been too limited. I thought of sin as a deliberate offence against God, a partial or total rejection of Him. But now I see that it is a mistake to restrict sin to specific acts...Rather is sin to be seen as an orientation, a more or less continual series of choices against whom what ones knows in one's heart to be right."*

Sister Ruth Burrows – Before the Living God

#### **4. Wisdom and Guidance**

*"And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke through the prophets"*

Nicene Creed

*" For no prophecy ever came from human initiative. When people spoke for God it was the Holy Spirit that moved them."*

2 Peter 1:21

#### Prophets and Saints

The Catholic Church has 2000 years of wisdom on the environment woven through its teaching, liturgy and the examples given by the lives of saints. Sometimes we can forget our own rich inheritance and so be deprived of riches that can engage our imagination and enable us to draw out the wisdom of ages in a modern context. Very often local saints, holy wells, churches, places of pilgrimage, local stories can help embed a community in its own environmental home. Concern for the earth is also about learning from the past and gaining much needed experience and wisdom from those who have faced challenges before and seen, through the eyes of faith, a way to make the world a better place. This Plan will encourage all Catholics to revisit the rich heritage of the past and see ancient wisdom as relevant to today's world.

### Sacraments

The Catholic use of the sacraments enables us to engage in a concrete way with the elements of the earth, water, fire, oil and ashes. The sacraments allow God to enrich our lives and bring grace to a broken world. They act at the personal level but also at the cosmic. The sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, the Eucharist, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders and Anointing the Sick all have the potential to instil in us a desire for wholeness with God which includes wholeness with creation. Much more can be done to release the potential of the sacraments to help us engage in a spiritual way with the environment.

### Seminaries

This is a rich area of potential change and training our next generation of clergy to inspire others to see God in the natural world will ensure Catholic environmental concern is embedded within our communities.

### Pilgrimages

Pilgrimages to sacred sites form an important part of Catholic tradition. We would encourage all pilgrims to make their journeys as environmentally sensitive as possible through their choice of transport and food. New pilgrimage routes could be determined that bring to light our traditional concern for the earth.

## **5. Media and Advocacy**

### New Media Publications

New media is now vital for communicating to large audiences. Podcasts, vodcasts, short videos for YouTube, audio programmes and social networking sites, wikis etc can all be used.

### Catholic Publications

Catholic outreach through various media such as websites, newsletters, Catholic press, podcasts, books and pamphlets is wide ranging and effective. Environmental publications are already available (Pain the Church Green etc) However there is a need to expand the number and outreach and this is fundamental to this Plan. We would encourage the Catholic press to support



environmental initiatives and to publicise good practice and events. We encourage printing on sustainably sourced paper and ink.

### CAFOD

CAFOD is a Catholic Church's agency that reaches out to the poor and marginalised. The environmental crisis and climate change are already having a big impact on the lives of the poorest people. Recent work by CAFOD has firmly placed climate change as part of its outreach especially in seeking a post-Kyoto treaty through the United Nations Convention on Climate Change. CAFOD is concerned that poor countries will be left out of the new push for green growth and is working hard to ensure that such growth is balanced, regulated and benefits the environment and poor communities. CAFOD could be a powerful tool to spread environmental concern and CAFOD will continue to work with the Catholic Community in England and Wales on these issues by building on the groundwork of the Live Simply Programme. Discussions are now underway to help the Bishops' Conference, CAFOD and other Catholic networks and organisations to work together to create change throughout the world.

<http://www.cafod.org.uk/policy-campaigns/climate-kit>

<http://www.cafod.org.uk/take-action/climate/road-to-copenhagen>

### Communications Departments

Many dioceses have their own communication departments and these can be used to help spread good news and best practice on the environment.

## **6. Partnerships and Eco-Twinning**

### Partnerships

The Catholic Church is committed to extending its partnerships with many organisations to help form approach to the environment. We are very keen to form long term associations with the world of science and conservation to inform our theology and teaching. Working with a scientific understanding of the problems is essential and quintessentially Catholic. We plan to actively engage in more fruitful partnerships. CAFOD has already begun this process with a new and exciting alliance with University College, London. The scientific work being done on short term climate change will help inform CAFOD's policy on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Both CAFOD and Progressio are members of Up in Smoke Coalition which has produced influential reports on climate change.

### Eco-Twinning

"Twinning" is the practice of towns, parishes, schools or dioceses developing long-lasting relationships of mutual benefit between communities in two distinct places. "Eco-twinning" takes that idea further - linking churches in the global north with those in the global south experiencing the detrimental effects of climate change first-hand. The Catholic Church is ideally suited to linking Catholic communities around the world so that environmental information,

ideas and support can be exchanged. Supporting eco-twinning in this context is an important part of the Plan for Generational Change.

### Interfaith Dialogue

Many communities are multi-cultural and have within them deep traditions that can enrich our own Christian perspective. Inviting other faiths to explain how they see our role in the world and define what they see as our relationship to the natural world can create an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. The environment is of concern to all, no matter whether we have faith or not. Concern for the earth is a great leveller and can be a way for us to work more closely together, highlighting our similarities and not concentrating on our differences. Interfaith dialogue will form an important part of this Plan.

*“The goal of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, which naturally differ in their respective nature and finality, is to seek and deepen a knowledge of the Truth. It is therefore a noble and obligatory task for every believer, since Christ himself is the Truth. The building of bridges between the great ecclesial Christian traditions, and dialogue with other religious traditions, demand a real striving for mutual understanding, because ignorance destroys more than it builds.”*

Pope Benedict, Lourdes Sept 2008

### The National Justice and Peace Network

The National Justice and Peace Network of England and Wales, a liaison body of the CBCEW, has taken on a serious commitment to address environmental issues, particularly since 2005 when its annual conference focused on environmental justice. It now has an Environment Working Group and has incorporated environmental education and campaigning into its development plans. Its 2010 conference will focus on food security. Diocesan groups have been involved in such initiatives as the ‘Ark’ campaign on climate change, Progressio’s work on food and water security, CAFOD’s mining campaign and the Jesuit Refugee Service work on environmental refugees. The work of the NJPC is essential to the success of this initiative and we will encourage Catholics to support them.

## **7. Assets**

The buildings and land holdings associated with the Catholic Church of England and Wales could helpfully be the subject of environmental audits and sensitive rebuilding/renovation that takes concern for the natural world into account; for example, by implementing standards that require us to care about energy use, water, recycled materials, sustainable wood and other raw materials, and Catholic places of worship or administration should be beacons of good practice that inspire the local communities.

We encourage all people of faith to form a rigorous and ethical purchasing policy. Ethical investments need to be considered when forming a financial policy.

The earth is held in the love of God, it reflects God's presence into our lives everyday. Cherishing and caring for this most wondrous of planets, and celebrating this great gift is at the heart of Catholic Christianity. And never has the time been more right to bring that belief once more into the centre of our lives. Now is the time to act for our future, the future of all our children and the future of creation itself.

### **Summary of Recommended Commitments.**

**We encourage all Catholics to:**

#### **Celebration**

- Celebrate the beauty of creation through liturgy and music and recognise a Creation Time in the year.
- Make church grounds a manifestation of care for the earth so that they form part of, and celebrate, our understanding of our role in nature.

#### **Education and Young People**

- Develop a sense of awe and wonder for creation in our young people through all subjects and ground them in a spiritual awareness of the need to care for creation.
- Actively encourage green living, gardening and food in all our schools and places of education. We encourage all to do environmental audits and track their progress.
- Share their experiences, ideas and challenges of what it is to be environmentally responsible and sensitive to nature.

#### **Lifestyles**

- Encourage car sharing, cycling or public transport.
- Observe Lent as a time of reflection on all our relationships, including our relationship with the rest of creation.
- Encourage everyone to understand that a simple lifestyle involves finding joy outside of consumerism.

#### **Wisdom and Guidance**

- Re-discover and learn more about those prophets and saints who cared for creation.
- Use the Sacraments as a means to a deeper understanding of our relationship with God through the gifts of nature.
- Promote the theology of creation in all places of learning and formation.
- Promote environmentally sensitive pilgrimages and re-discover ancient routes that deepen our understanding of our past, present and future spiritual relationship with the natural world.

#### **Media and Advocacy**

- Explore new media and its potential for informing and inspiring a spiritual approach to the earth.

- Encourage all diocesan and other institutions' communication departments to spread the good news about what is happening and best practice.

### **Partnerships and Eco-Twinning**

- Form partnerships within and without the Church to gain a greater understanding of environmental issues and how they are affecting local, national and international issues.
- To be aware of how environmental issues are affecting other parts of the world and affecting people's lives, perhaps through existing twinning relationships.
- Support groups, such as the diocesan Justice and Peace Commissions, working for environmental justice.
- Engage in dialogue with other Christian about their work in this area.
- Encourage inter-faith dialogue on an understanding of the environment.

### **Assets**

- Encourage environmental audits and track their progress.
- Manage land associated with all Catholic buildings in an environmentally sensitive way.
- Further promote an ethical purchasing policy, which is already underway.