



## ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

*Dear Sisters & brothers in Christ*

7<sup>th</sup> February 2018

Care for God's creation is fundamental to Christian faith. It is an issue that is deeply rooted in the whole of Scripture, starting with Genesis, and the depiction of an intimately interconnected world, where everything that happens in the human realm has consequences in the natural and animal realms. Human beings are tasked with responsibility for caring for creation and, later, in the story of the flood, with giving account for the 'lifeblood' of every animal. The legal system of the Old Testament provides rest for the land as much as for its people, and the well-being of the nation of Israel is always linked to that of the land itself. In the New Testament, the picture of renewal and new life brought by Jesus Christ is not limited to humans, but reaches the whole of creation, groaning for renewal in Romans 8, and finding fulfilment, healing and salvation in the imagery of Colossians 1 with the supremacy of Christ, the firstborn of all creation.

Christians are starting to recover a better understanding of the Genesis creation story. The command to subdue was, until the end of the 1960s, interpreted very literally, to rule and dominate as a king might dominate his subjects. Thus, the abuse and misuse of the environment has also been deeply rooted in our historic value systems, driven by a cultural or religious commitment to an exploitative understanding of creation set out in the apparent meaning of Genesis 1:26–31. Yet, this passage is one that sets out basic principles of the call to human beings to reflect God's creative love for the whole of the earth, and to exercise that responsibility in the context of love. Creation is to be nurtured as God would nurture it. It is not a possession for disposal, but a trust to be cared for, what Christians refer to as stewardship.

Having taken the Letters for Creation project to the Primates' meeting in Canterbury in 2017 where they discussed climate change and its effects on their Provinces, I look forward to the activities that will take place at Lambeth Palace and around the world during this year's Creationtide, taking place on 1 September to 4 October 2018. I join with 2.2 billion Christians and all the millions of members of the Anglican Communion to continue to pray for and care for creation.

As the fifth of the Anglican Communion's Five Marks of Mission says, we are "to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth." That has been in our objectives as a Communion for many years and I am pleased to see how across the Communion we now have an added focus and sense of urgency to live out these fundamental values through prayer, witness and action. I am deeply honoured to be chair and patron of the Anglican Communion's movement on the environment as, together, we take forward this important responsibility of care for our Common Home.

The issue of climate change merits specific attention because it is in many ways one of the most important challenges we face. In 1945, the stability of the climate and the environment was taken for granted. Today, it is overwhelmingly accepted that human activity is the major cause of climate change, and represents a massive threat to our future. As is widely recognised by the vast majority of the scientific community, climate change is an existential danger to the planet



and to its human occupants; it is therefore of pre-eminent importance to incorporate it into the application of our values. It is the principal example in which our historic Christian values, applied in the twenty-first century, have significant impact not only for our generation but also for those not yet born, reflecting our responsibilities and obligations towards them. Human activity, which has contributed significantly to current problems and threatens the prospects of people today and future generations, is out of step with faith-based understandings of responsibility for the planet and the way in which we live needs to change.

In my Province, I know that there is much more we need to do when it is the case that our own standard of living depends heavily on the use of carbon- generating materials. Burning things and consuming things has made life better for many in some countries. In the United Kingdom, currently 29.8 per cent of our electricity generation comes from renewables. Given that our economic prosperity in the UK at present depends to a large extent on fuels and materials which are considered to contribute to climate change, and thus that the investment required and the cost of moving to renewables is often thought to be high and very demanding in terms of national effort and policy, the subject is controversial on economic grounds alone. The response to climate change is not, however, to recklessly deindustrialise and put up with worse lives, lower life expectancy and high levels of economic inactivity; instead the economic opportunities arising from the necessary investment to decarbonise the economy does, I believe, provides extraordinary scope for the formation of new industries, services, jobs and revenues at individual, company, both at national and global levels.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), unanimously adopted by 193 UN Member States in 2015, sets out a bold new global agenda to both end poverty by 2030 and pursue a sustainable future, and includes Goal 13: 'Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts' which begins by saying: 'Climate change presents the single biggest threat to development, and its widespread, unprecedented impacts disproportionately burden the poorest and most vulnerable. Urgent action to combat climate change and minimise its disruptions is integral to the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.' I welcome the steps taken by the Archbishops of Brazil, Australia, Central Africa, Polynesia and Cape Town who have written to world leaders drawing attention to the significant threat posed by climate change, expressing their concerns over its impact on vulnerable communities worldwide and urging each nation's leaders to keep the promises they made in the Paris Agreement, to restore the natural balance. As the Anglican Communion, we need to continue to be deeply engaged in achieving the SDGs, as we are through the Anglican Alliance and through the everyday actions of 85 million Anglicans worldwide, 90% of whom are in the Global South, who care for our Common Home. The work of The Anglican Church of Burundi (EAB) which has been awarded a Certificate of Merit from the government's environment ministry for its ongoing tree-planting campaign, is just one example of what is being done.

As I wrote in the New York Times, as people of faith, we must not just state our beliefs — we must live them out. One of our central beliefs is that we find purpose and joy in loving our neighbours. Another is that we are charged by our Creator with taking good care of his creation. The ethical crisis of climate change is an opportunity to find purpose and joy, and to respond to our Creator's charge. Reducing the causes of climate change is essential to the life of faith. It is a way to love our neighbour and to steward the gift of creation.

*in the peace of Christ  
+ his Father:*

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby  
Archbishop of Canterbury