

This mark is explicitly concerned with people but ecological concerns are still prominent. Climate volatility, loss of biodiversity and concern about the future, create human need. This can range from those who are unable to produce a harvest, or who have lost their homes to flood in this country and around the world, to those who are mourning the loss of countryside and species and need to lament.

Many people do not have ready access to “green space” despite this being shown to be helpful to well-being and mental health, the local churchyard might well fill this deficit. Those who are anxious and fearful about the future, who want to change to a more sustainable lifestyle but do not know how and indeed those who are angry and resistant to necessary changes all have needs which the Church is well placed to meet, particularly if able to anticipate future needs and take a proactive approach.



Fourth mark of mission: To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, (Col 1:19,20)

The ecological issues we face today are justice issues. The global poor are disproportionately affected and those countries which have benefited least from exploitation of the Earth’s resources bear a disproportionate amount of the cost. There is also the question of inter-generational justice when we note the extent of the problems we are bequeathing to the next generation. We might even consider our actions and inactions as theft from later generations. As the crisis worsens it is anticipated that competition for increasingly scarce resources will make peace even harder to achieve.

Clearly the Church has a prophetic role here, but **if we are truly to advocate for the Earth and its people and call others to account, we must be able to name humanity’s treatment of the Earth for what it is – abuse and violence, which has fractured the relationship between people and the planet which sustains them.**

Christ brings reconciliation to all things, but **what might reconciliation between people and the Earth look like?**

The Environment and The Five Marks of Mission

This brief introduction to the environment and the five marks of mission has been written by John Hughes (Diocesan Environmental Officer, Manchester) and Ruth Newton (Area Champion, Ripon South). It aims to help you place creation-care at the heart of discipleship.

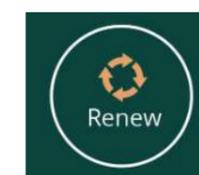


The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ:

1. To **proclaim** the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise & **nurture** new believers
3. To respond to human need by **loving** service
4. To **transform** unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and **renew** the life of the earth

The fifth mark of mission is the mark which most explicitly provides the missionary rationale for engaging with environmental issues. It’s position at number five is rather unfortunate, implying that it is perhaps the least important, something of a “Cinderella” in comparison with the others.

Such is the present threat to the integrity of creation that “Cinderella” is beginning to be recognised as “the belle of the ball,” - the missionary priority upon which all other marks depend. Each of the marks of mission demands ecological engagement and will be enriched and deepened by it.



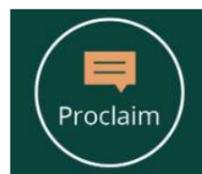
The fifth mark of mission: To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

“Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth....This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth” (Gen:9 16,17)

We are rightly concerned about the abuse of children and vulnerable people and are concerned to “safeguard” against it. The Earth has been and continues to be abused, raped, objectified and exploited and “striving to safeguard the integrity of creation” must be approached with a similar rigour.

The predictions about the future of life on this planet make for alarming and depressing reading and the need to repent of the past and live more sustainably is abundantly clear. It would be easy to despair, but our faith in a Saviour who brings healing, renewal, forgiveness and restoration not only for people, but for the whole earth gives us grounds for hope.

As a landowner, the Church is well placed to take a lead in ecologically sensitive land management, not forgetting the thousands of Churchyards which could be “arks for vulnerable species”.



First Mark of Mission: To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

“He said to them ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation’” Mark 16:15

If we wish “to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom”, we need to earn a hearing. Authenticity and credibility are prerequisites. Working on environmental projects, campaigning to protect the planet, speaking out on ecological issues can give us precisely these, generating the good will, social capital and trusted relationships that prepare the way for sharing the good news.

Sensitive evangelism addresses context, presenting the Gospel message in a way which is relevant to those being addressed. Today’s context is an ecological crisis which threatens the future of humanity. Is it possible to proclaim “good news” which does not address this? For many, young people in particular, this is *the* primary concern, but are we addressing it in our evangelism?

Historically, the Gospel has been presented in anthropocentric terms focussing primarily on “good news for all people”. (Luke 2:10), and “making disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19) but in Mark, the disciples are commissioned to “proclaim good news to *all creation*.” (16:15) What would good news for the entire cosmos look like?



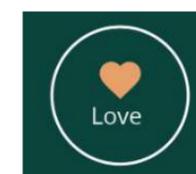
Second mark of mission: To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10)

We teach, baptise and nurture so that we may be formed into the likeness of Christ, adopt a distinctively Christian ethic and take our unique place in the community of believers. To help us do this we familiarise ourselves with scripture and tradition and reflect on the connections between our understanding of faith and how we live our lives.

Once again context is crucial. Is the teaching and nurturing that is being provided equipping Christians and the Christian community to respond to the challenges and dilemmas that the ecological crisis presents? Are we able to articulate a scriptural response, or our ethical responsibilities? Are we being helped to relate our faith to actions such as reducing carbon or plastic usage? Is environmental responsibility been taught as part of Christian distinctiveness? There are many ways this might be achieved, through liturgy, preaching, small groups, learning communities, children and young people’s work, theological & formational training, and spiritual direction.

The rite of baptism gives us opportunities to teach about repentance and new life. The water of the Jordan is now too polluted to use for baptism, yet water itself is a symbol of rebirth and renewal. Through it we can speak words of hope, forgiveness and new beginnings. We work and pray for a time when rivers are restored and the seas are not choked with plastic.



Third mark of mission: To respond to human need by loving service.

“He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.” (Luke 10:34)
