

# Young Christians are calling for climate justice

**Molly Clark** shares the vision of the Young Christian Climate Network (YCCN)



Photo credit: Anne Barth, Greenpeace

When I first heard about YCCN, I couldn't wait to join. I have been involved in campaigning for several years at my university (primarily around fossil fuel divestment), but never in a Christian context before. My desire to follow the example of Christ's love and compassion has always been an important motivation for me; and I was eager to have the opportunity to work in a group that was collectively powered by this force of faith. Sure enough, the community I found was welcoming, empathetic, and committed. I was also attracted by the fact that right from its inception, YCCN centred climate justice: an approach to the climate crisis that emphasises its humanitarian and political dimensions.

Frontline communities have been suffering the effects of climate change for my whole lifetime. From floods in Bangladesh to droughts in Malawi, lives

and livelihoods are being lost while the UK prevaricates over measures that are often too little, too late. This reflects global inequalities, and it is hard to deny that racism and neo-colonial attitudes lurk behind the general apathy of the Global North towards the crisis.

Issues of indigenous sovereignty also come into play, when fossil fuel companies co-opt natural resources for their extraction projects without the consent of the people that live on and care for that land. At its heart, the problems we are facing stem not only from fuel consumption, but from deeply entrenched systems of exploitation. To quote from the YCCN website: "This crisis arises from our abuse of God's creation, and our broken relationship with our neighbours worldwide who suffer most from its consequences. We are convinced of the biblical mandate to care for creation, and lament its

exploitation. We believe in God's imperative call for justice on the earth, and repent of our callousness."

Climate justice is intrinsically related to social justice, in that it takes aim at inequality. This is not only the case on a global scale. Those of us who work for climate justice should also consider the social divisions that exist in our own local communities – and this is another concern of YCCN members. In our own area, why might some people be more exposed to pollution than others? And if there were to be a flood, what kinds of privilege – whether of wealth, race, region, age, class, disability, gender, childcare responsibilities, line of work, and many more – might enable some people to put their lives back together again faster than others?

These social structures need to be borne in mind in activist circles too. Sustainable lifestyles, eco-friendly consumer choices and having time for activism are easier for some people than others. Climate justice campaigning should take these things into account when spreading our message and should make sure that everyone can get involved in a way that suits them.

Climate justice and social justice are strongly linked, then, both in broader goals and in practical applications in the community. This is something of which I am increasingly aware, and which I am keen to manifest as much as possible in my actions and my activism. Being a part of YCCN will help to equip me with the skills needed.

I am lucky to be in a Church – St Paul’s, Clapham, London – that is equally keen to make progress on climate and social justice. Throughout 2020, our congregation at St Paul’s focussed on two main areas: becoming an active force for anti-racism, and attaining our Silver Eco Church award. The work done on these issues already is a credit to the many dynamic and inspirational people in our community. As one of the relatively few young people in our congregation, I am excited to contribute some of YCCN’s values to the conversations within the Church. For example, I gave a Parish Zoom talk on climate justice and helped to facilitate a discussion group on climate change and the Global South. We based this around a transcript of a speech from the Wretched of the Earth collective.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://realmedia.press/wretched-of-the-earth-global-climate-strike/> (this is a coalition of climate justice groups led by Indigenous people and people of colour)

During these events, I aimed to convey the message that our two goals – anti-racism and green sustainability – should be interlinked. While we continue to tackle the specifics of each individual goal on its own terms, we also aim to consider the ways in which the two are connected, and use that connection to derive mutual benefit and redoubled energy. My hope is that, by foregrounding the political significance of the climate crisis (rather than focussing on individual actions and lifestyle choices), I was able to engage a wider range of people with the issue, and introduce new lines of thought. Joining YCCN gave me the confidence to frame my ideas and bring my voice to these discussions.

Looking to the future, as well as equipping our members to work for climate justice in their own Churches, workplaces, and communities, YCCN also aims to lobby for change more

widely. As COP26 approaches, we want to send a strong message to the nation’s Churches – and to the government – that climate justice is an urgent priority. We hope our voices will be heard.

As the YCCN website states: “We trust in a God who is good, and who is powerful, even in the worst of circumstances. With God, there is always possibility for change. We also acknowledge our agency: that God’s possibility is often made real through us. So we do not wait to feel hope before acting, but expect hope to grow as we act.” ■



Molly Clark is completing a doctorate on Shakespeare. She also publishes poetry under her full name, Mary Anne Clark. In her spare time she likes to walk, cook, campaign and volunteer, generally in the areas of climate justice, human rights, and education access.



Photo credit: Evan Habil, Greenpeace