

# green christian

the magazine

We dare  
to hope

# We dare to hope!

**Clare Redfern**, Editor

**H**ope risks sounding a bit too easy at the moment. Writing from my comfortable home, just weeks into the invasion of Ukraine, it could seem trite and insensitive. Can we really talk about hope when thousands are bereaved, injured, homeless, hungry and cold, their future upended? A people devastated yet defiant.

And realistically, what hope can we hold out for the people whose countries have been ravaged by conflict for decades: Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen to name but a few. And those millions already bearing the brunt of climate chaos around the world. The most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report spells out starkly how the world is set on a course for at least 3 degrees of heating, with disastrous consequences ultimately for billions. As its Co-Chair commented *"Any further delay in concerted global action will miss the brief, rapidly closing window in which to secure a liveable future."*

Let's admit it: things seem pretty grim. To say we have hope could sound hollow and meaningless.

But as the Deep Waters course suggests: *"Hope is not optimism that things will get better. Active hope engages deeply with issues and tirelessly seeks solutions."*

Our contributors in this issue directly address their emotional turmoil: anger, despair and uncertainty evoked by the sense of a relentless rising tide of conflicts and crises; a sense maybe of hope running out. They are explicit about their struggles and fears but also share their journeys of finding and giving encouragement, forging partnerships, of reaching out to nurture places of fruitful collaboration.

There are stories of being quiet and attentive, or vocal and provocative, witnessing to struggles, of wrestling prayerfully and persistently. Of listening, as Frankie Ward describes for *"God's love ... deep in Creation ... a song of the grace that pours out to the ends of the world."*

Many of our writers describe sowing seeds. It's a very real aspect of survival, of nourishment, of growing the food we need, also a metaphor for the hope of new things coming to life, of trust in a better future, of beauty and wholeness springing up afresh.

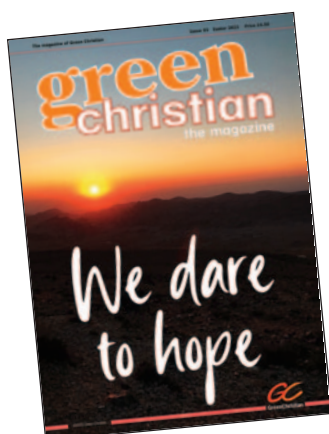
Jesus said that with just a mustard seed of faith that which seems impossible can be realised, even moving a mountain!

I hope you will find encouragement in these pages to reach out, alongside others and plant seeds (however tiny), take hopeful steps (however small), acting with faith and hope for a better future. Let's be persistent in finding the good soil, the support and nurture that we need.

The "Good News" of Jesus coming down to share in the world's suffering and hopelessness remains as bright and clear as ever. We watch and wait with the hope of resurrection, of life springing up out of suffering and death. ■



Clare Redfern,  
Editor



Our cover image is taken from one of the new Green Christian posters. We have included a free set of these with this mailing. Please be imaginative in how you use them. You can stick them in your windows, display in your church and share with your friends and neighbours.

Need more posters? Need bigger posters? See the GC News page for details of how to order.



## Green Christian

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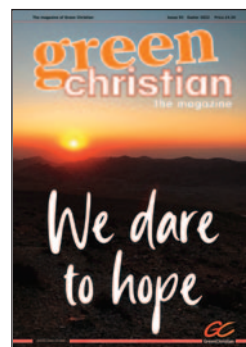
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# From anxiety and anger – to action!

New member, **Jacquie Tricker** found help in Deep Waters, a project of Green Christian's Borrowed Time



COP26 March in Woodbridge, Suffolk

Photo credit: Charmian Berry

It was unsettling for me to feel so angry about something. Okay, I'm a cyclist so I do sometimes feel a shaking fist coming on whilst being too narrowly overtaken. But this was deep and brooding and I wasn't getting the antidote at church.

As church cleaner, I was getting nowhere trying to make small significant changes in sourcing "eco" cleaning products and even getting the congregation to clear up after themselves at events was proving controversial. The church bins said it all. I often needed to grow longer arms to pick out all the unwelcome items from the depths of the blue recycling bin: dirty wipes, teabags, broken glass and even

dirty nappies. Grrrr! Didn't we all have the same rules to follow for our own recycling at home? I glued another fresh set of the East Suffolk Recycling instructions onto the bin lid. I felt like an eco-exile in my own Church.

So it was providential that I came across the online presence of Green Christian and became aware that my "tribe" did exist. I dipped in to various webinars and prayer events before signing up for the Deep Waters course which was due to start in May 2021. I had heard of eco-anxiety, but hadn't sussed that maybe I was suffering from it.

Fortunately, Deep Waters fulfilled my

expectations and I was able to examine my anger and see a way forward where I would be able to channel that passionate rage into something more creative and worthwhile.

It was affirming to join a group where my feelings were understood and not condemned. Others felt angry too, I was not alone. And some people had found peace and had worked through some of their existential Angst. There was some theology to grapple with and I realised that there was a role for Churches in offering pastoral care for those who were feeling devastated that our careless human activity could render the world uninhabitable.



It's quite a commitment to sign up for eight weeks and to set aside time to prepare. However, I only missed one of the weekly evening sessions. As for preparation, I devoured the weekly spread of poems, articles, art, video and music links which were provided. Not a hardship – I'd love to read it all again and let it sink in anew. How right it felt to read in my Bible the previously rarely-thumbed book of Lamentations and the prophet Jeremiah, and some of the less happy-clappy psalms; how much more sense they made to me now.

I discovered the grief experienced in response to the climate emergency even had a name: solastalgia! And the poetry of Wendell Berry and Gerard Manley Hopkins seem to come into their own in this context. The music of Porter's Gate has become a real friend and my favourite is Josh Garrel's rendition of St Teresa of Avila's "Christ has no body now but yours."

Our breakout room on Zoom was a safe space for us to reflect on each week's topic in more depth. Strangely, it was a revelation to me that the best support for my "eco-anxiety" was close at hand. My

husband Dave is fully on board and many of my closest neighbours have proved to be deep green in the best possible way. Other participants were encouraged when I shared with the larger group about the mutual support practised along our terrace of 16 houses.

Our front gardens are getting more wildlife friendly (it saves the mid-terrancers carrying their lawnmowers through their houses) and a hedgehog has been spotted. We've held a simple Climate Service in our garden and our lovely neighbours (a mixed bunch spiritually) have participated wholeheartedly. During the lockdown, we often met outside for a coffee and chat, or "Local Food" meals in our access road.

Moreover, things are starting to happen in local churches, including a Climate Sunday service and a Tearfund discussion series "Christians and Climate Change." Together, our little gang from various local Churches managed to collaborate with Transition Woodbridge and East Suffolk WI to organise a well-attended COP26 march through Woodbridge. This gave me a creative and legitimate outlet for my pent up eco-rage, especially since I had insanely agreed to address the 290 marchers with an opening speech. I'd never done anything like that before but I absolutely loved it – the crowd was egging me on!

Our "tribe" is now keen not to lose the momentum gained to make a positive green impact in our community. On the morning of the march, a small group of us gave out narcissi bulbs and bookmarks to passers-by, as a sign of hope. Inspired by the Bible verse, from Revelation 22:2, "The leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations" we asked people to write down their hopes and fears about the environment on leaf-shaped paper which we pegged to a tree



Jacquie and Dave Tricker with Andrea Skevington offer leaves and bulbs to passersby

Photo credit: Charmian Berry

in the town centre. A local Woodbridge writer and poet, Andrea Skevington, later composed these leaf comments into a beautiful poem, which she presented to the Town Council and to our MP, Dr Therese Coffey.

Oh yes! And next time I run out of a cleaning product at church, I've promised myself to take direct action by walking round the corner to the local eco refill shop! ■

Link to Andrea's poem:

<https://andreaskevington.com/2021/11/24/november-leaves-community-poem-update/>



Jacqueline Tricker had a somewhat "Good Life" upbringing in Suffolk. She is a Scout leader, church cleaner and language teacher. She enjoys messing about on the River Deben, either crewing a Cornish Cormorant or rowing with the Woodbridge Coastal Rowing Club.



Bookmark of Hope (Stamp by Noolibird)

Photo credit: A. Skevington

# Clouds of despair and life-giving light!

**Frankie Ward** urges us to let grace break through



The cycle of the seasons, Hildegard von Bingen

Photo credit: wikiart.org

My thoughts and prayers recently have increasingly dwelt on fragile hopes and sombre fears. Considering this devastated yet beautiful world, we can be overwhelmed by anxiety and grief. Opportunities are running out, tipping points perilously near. Have we so disrupted the order of things that we are now reaping the whirlwinds of disaster?

And besides ecological devastation and a chaotic climate, there's the sense of democracy threatened, a world where algorithms and big-tech control our choices and values; where malign forces are sowing seeds of distrust, hatred and violence.

To me it's like we're in a toxic cloud of uncertainty and threat, such that we can find it very difficult to find hope for the future. We don't know where we're going or what will happen. A cloud that surrounds our troubled nations, our troubled world. And in

that cloud, where is God, the Creator of this beautiful world?

It's then that we must remember that God's grace breaks through, for it is already there: in sea, cloud, and tree, in stars, and in the wildness yet. God's grace breaks through, because the world is sacramental. This Earth knows God and responds with *jouissance*, with rapture, with vibrant dance of atoms. The cloud of uncertainty, of unknowing, is also a cloud of witnesses to God's love. The Holy Spirit moves over the depths of our fears. God's love is deep in Creation, as a song of the grace that pours out to the ends of the world.

I am reminded of a rather wonderful saint from the 12th Century. Hildegard of Bingen – a Benedictine nun who founded two monasteries, wrote theological, botanical, and medicinal texts, as well as letters, poems, hymns and antiphons, and painted miniature illuminations. She was a polymath, active as a writer, composer, philosopher, mystic and visionary.

Her writings are notable for her use of startling imagery, which capture the visions she experienced, from the age of seven. She called it *umbra viventis lucis*, the reflection of the living Light. She had a sense of profound harmony and symphony at the heart of everything, and, surprisingly, this had a colour as well as a sound and light.

Hildegard wrote of *viriditas* – a bright, vivid greenness, which meant for her the force which gives life through Creation. She wrote that into all sterility the divine power sends “the moisture of fresh greenness and the warmth of sunlight”. She wrote (in a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux) of Jesus as “the Word from which all the world was created, by the height of the Father who through the sweet power of green vigour sent the Word to the Virgin's womb where it took on flesh like the honey in the honeycomb.”

Hildegard's images are beautiful; her music gorgeous. And we learn from her that “Green” is the colour of the spiritual transformation inside that turns us towards the light and love. Hildegard, with her wonderful idea of *viriditas*, helps us understand that fear isn't the final word, for God's life and love hold us in hope. Hildegard was often depressed, “oppressed by a great sadness”, yet she found in God's grace a great





Frontispiece of Scivias showing Hildegard receiving a vision dictating to Volmar and sketching  
Photo credit: wikiart.org

strength, comparing this to being like a feather, carried on the wind:

*“a feather does not fly of its own accord; it is borne up by the air. So too I am not imbued with human doctrine or strong powers. Nor do I desire good bodily health. Rather, I depend entirely on God’s help.”<sup>1</sup>*

Current crises may stir in us new emotions of deep anxiety, even despair. What are we to do with these debilitating feelings? How are we to come to terms with our own internal anguish, such that we are able to turn out and offer a message of hope to others?

The only place, it seems to me, that we can go is further towards the God of grace who created this beautiful, joyous world. We can turn to traditions of lament, for words so often fail to articulate the depth of pain. We can allow the heart to pray with sighs too deep for words; the Spirit helps us in our weakness to turn again to God in repentance.

In *Scivias*, Hildegard describes “a shining fire, unfathomable,

*inextinguishable, fully alive and existing full of life”.*

This flame full of life is also active and eventful. She heard a voice from the living flame, which told her:

*“Nevertheless you are touched by my light, which touches your inner being with fire like the burning sun. Shout and tell! And write down these my mysteries which you see and hear in the mystical vision! Do not be afraid, but tell the mysteries as you understand them in the spirit, as I speak them through you. May they be ashamed who should be showing righteousness to my people!”*

Like Hildegard, rather than running away into frenetic busyness, paralysis, or angry displacement, we need to know again our dependence on the God of grace. We can start where we are, trusting in the grace of God to convert our fear to hope, so anxiety motivates change. Living in God’s grace allows thankfulness to transform God-forsakenness, for God so loves the world – not as a thing, to be used and abused, but a living Creation that inspires awe, wonder and enchantment.

We can see signs of that grace all around, with eyes to see and ears to hear. That grace can stir us to action – to change our lifestyles, to provoke politicians to the right priorities, to challenge big business to have regard not just for profit, but for the future of our very existence.

Action born of hope begins with the cherishing of God’s Creation as sacramental, infused with a grace behind, beneath, beyond the materiality of things, actions, senses. I listen now, wherever I am, for the wild patience of God, creating and sustaining the Universe, despite the desecrations of human sin.

To go green entails a spiritual journey – into despair, to find our hope born of the anguish we can feel. To go green, spiritually, is to embrace a way of life that turns away from self, from pride and greed, towards a love that shines through all Creation with beauty, joy and peace, with vibrant *viriditas*. *Viriditas* enables us to see with new eyes, the cloak of grace, of light, of glory and joy. There, instead of sterile fear and despair, we find goodness and loving mercy.

Hildegard speaks over the centuries with a wisdom that we need to hear today. ■



Revd Dr Frankie Ward is a parish priest in West Cumbria, a former Dean of St Edmundsbury Cathedral and she also led the Green Christian retreat at Ringsfield Hall in 2021. She is author of *Like there’s no tomorrow: Climate Change, Eco-anxiety and God*.

1 Scivias, Hildegard von Bingen (1152)

# The Treehouse Project

**Jackie Turvey Tait** encourages us to create places of nurture and hope



Photo credit: Shutterstock

Easter is traditionally a time of hope. But where will we find hope in these troubled times, when anxiety and even despair seem warranted by the very real and imminent threats being faced? The “Treehouse Project” is based on the idea that we can acknowledge grief and anxiety yet still be active builders of hope. Our vision is to see small-scale peer support groups grow into larger hubs, empowering us all to imagine new ways to build wellbeing and resilience in our communities.

This project at St Michael’s in Chester is still at the “acorn” stage. We are thinking about what we can do as a Church to support wellbeing in our community, mindful of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental health, especially amongst the most vulnerable.

Then there is the climate emergency: a recent global survey illustrates the burden of climate anxiety on mental health amongst young adults.<sup>1</sup> The statistics make grim reading: three quarters of young people see the future as frightening; over half say they think humanity is doomed. Four out of ten are hesitant to have children. The survey points out the links between youth anxiety and government inaction on the climate emergency, stressing that young people — understandably — feel abandoned and betrayed.

The war in Ukraine compounds climate vulnerabilities too; besides the tragic destruction and loss of life we see on the news, the effects on food security in Africa and the Middle East threaten even greater political instability, and closer to home are adding to already rising costs of living.

We all need the safety net of resilient, connected, caring communities; we all need a safe space, a sanctuary, where we can build relationships of trust and find spiritual healing. If your congregation is wrestling with these issues, could your Church provide a safe space for a small group to share? A “pop-up café” can be a really good place to start. With a simple meal, or just coffee and cake, this can enable authentic conversations about our emotional responses to these difficult times.

Mind have online resources for setting up peer-support groups for those of us who share lived experience of anxiety, distress or despair<sup>2</sup>; Rethink! have a peer support network, and can help with support and accreditation if you want to set up a new group in your community.<sup>3</sup> If you feel called to explore the theology and pastoral care challenges of mental distress, Sanctuary Ministries<sup>4</sup> have fantastic free resources to download for small group reflection, and Professor John Swinton’s book *Finding Jesus in the Storm*, (SCM Press, 2020) is a very accessible, thought-provoking read.

1 Hickman et al. (2021). *Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey*. *Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(12), e863-e873. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(21\)00278-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00278-3)

2 Mind: Peer support. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/peer-support/about-peer-support/>

3 Rethink: Peer support. <https://www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/support-groups/>

4 Sanctuary Ministries: <https://www.sanctuarymentalhealth.org/uk/>



My friend Chris hosts a “pop-up café” with his church community in Boughton, Chester. He is also working with volunteers to co-produce a more ambitious project providing a range of activities including gardening, arts and crafts, and games. Chris’s project was the inspiration for the Acorn Café at St Michael’s, and the reason we call our overall vision for growing caring communities “The Treehouse Project.”

Chris likened his expanding project to an acorn growing into a mighty oak. This really resonated with me as a Christian because, in the Bible in Genesis 18:1, it was under oak trees that Abraham and Sarah “*entertained angels unawares*”. As an ecotheologian, I was also reminded that a mature oak is a natural symbol of hospitality, providing sustenance and sanctuary for over 2,000 woodland species. There are more than 600 different species of oak around the world: their ecological importance is matched by their cross-cultural religious and poetic symbolism.

Chris’s “pop-up café” that grows into a wellbeing “tree” is a model that could be reproduced in any community. But the “treehouse” phase of the project needs to be tailored to local needs, because every community is different. Chris and I are part of a Rethink! team working with the NHS on community care transformation. Agreed core principles of this transformation include a commitment to empowering people who have suffered from mental distress to lead the co-production of services, together with secular and faith-based voluntary organisations in the community.

A friend from St Michael’s used to work for the Cinnamon Network.<sup>5</sup> They have a whole range of exciting faith-based projects that have been successfully piloted by pioneering Churches. The projects have been packaged so that they can be reproduced by other communities, depending on local need and resources, with support from the network. Watching the video clips on their website, it occurred to me that all of the projects, in one way or another, are designed to address what psychologists call the “social determinants” of mental health (for example: social connectedness, solidarity, trust and reciprocity, or conversely deprivation and social disorder). In theological language, they are projects designed to build hope.

There is professional support and funding available for secular and faith groups wanting to contribute to building communities that care. Although every “treehouse” will be different, a lot of what is most desperately needed right now is deeply rooted in our religious traditions: the provision of sanctuary and hospitality, creating a culture of encounter that welcomes the



Photo credit: Shutterstock

stranger, listening to the cry of the Earth and of our vulnerable neighbours.

The Church has long known where Christ will be found in times of crisis. He will be found amongst the anxious and distressed, amongst the marginalised, the “*least among us*”, those most at risk in a world on fire. We will find Him when we make time to really listen, when we make space for strange encounters, when we support and empower those who are experiencing powerlessness and despair.

In Christ we have a model of the responsible, compassionate leadership so desperately needed in our current crises. Wherever we work together with people of faith and goodwill to build communities that care, serving our neighbourhoods and embodying our shared values, hope will rise again. Christian hope makes space for the victims of war and trauma, it reaches out to mitigate suffering and vulnerability. It does not shame or exclude the anxious and despairing.

When we feel we have nothing left but lament for what is lost, Christ meets us again in the garden; the risen Lord waits in the green shade of an ancient oak, to wash our feet in welcome, calling us to rest. His love brings healing to a hurting world, regenerates our hope, renews our vision. Then He sends us out to plant acorns, nurture growing trees and build resilient, caring communities. ■



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<sup>5</sup> The Cinnamon Network: Recommended Projects.  
<https://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/projects/>

# COP26 – the hopes, dreams and reality

After cycling 700 miles to Glasgow, **Euan McPhee** explains why



Euan arrives at Exeter Cathedral, Friday 3 September

All photo credits: Euan McPhee

On 1st September last year, at the beginning of the Season of Creationtide, I set out from Truro Cathedral on my bicycle to ride to Glasgow, ahead of the COP26 Climate Summit. The main reason was to encourage the participants at the conference to be bold in their ambitions, and to show solidarity with those people who are in the front line of the effects of climate change.

I visited each Anglican diocese on the route and collected their climate or



Euan presenting Green Christian's Climate Declaration to Revd Jonnie Parkin at Bristol Cathedral

environmental declarations. These dioceses were: Truro; Exeter; Bath & Wells; Bristol; Gloucester; Worcester; Birmingham; Lichfield; Chester; Liverpool; Manchester; Blackburn; Carlisle. After two weeks of cycling and 700 miles covered, I arrived in Glasgow on 17th September.

My purpose in assembling this portfolio of commitments by the various dioceses was to make the point: the Church is responding to the climate and ecological crisis, and its members are beginning to understand the urgency of the crisis and appreciate that sacrifices will be required to reach "net-zero" sooner rather than later.

So why cycle at all? What effect can it have?

Firstly, I simply felt that I had to do something! Having cycled from Truro to Paris for COP21 and from Paris to Bonn

for COP23, it seemed like I simply had to keep up the momentum and ride again! On the previous rides there were four of us and we sought to help raise awareness on the way and at our destinations. So also on this ride.

And in answer to the second question, I have to say – I don't know! But, to quote Gandhi "Whatever you do may seem insignificant to you, but it is most important that you do it." Conversations along the way gave me the opportunity to talk about the issues. I also met many people of goodwill, both within and outwith the Church, who shared their hopes and fears – and that gave me hope. And I think my small efforts also provided hope for some people too!

I returned to Glasgow on 31st October, this time by train, to hand over the documents. Bishop Graham Usher, who leads the Church of England's Environment Programme, received them during the COP26 conference and shared them with UK's COP26 negotiators there.

I also spent time at Govan & Linthouse Parish Church, helping out with the Green Christian presence there. The location appeared deeply symbolic; as one of the former centres of British shipbuilding, it is now bereft of that industry – and it showed. The neighbourhood was made up on the one hand of the old tenement blocks that had seen better days. On the other hand, nearby is a new subway station, bus terminus and shopping centre. Between the two sat the church. It felt as if the area was still trying to discover its reason for existence.



I did not manage to get into the Blue Zone, where the official negotiations were taking place; and I only once visited the Green Zone, where all the environmental and business organisations were located and various talks were taking place. Somehow, being on the outside of all the decision-making seemed to symbolise where most people feel they are in terms of having any influence on the future of the planet and of humanity.

And yet it was good to be there!

Sharing with fellow Green Christians and other kindred spirits; hearing from young people, especially members of YCCN (the Young Christian Climate Network), of their fierce love and commitment; attending talks where indigenous people shared the platform with allies from the (over?) developed world. And joining the march on Saturday, despite the cold, wind and rain, was a powerful affirmation of the cause. We even saw a rainbow on the way through Glasgow!

So, has COP26 delivered?

I have to admit that my expectations were always going to be greater than anything likely to come out of these talks. Unlike COP21 in Paris, which ended on a high when a deal was reached at the last

moment, the end of COP26 was marked by a retreat from a more radical stance on the phasing out of coal. There was simply not that unanimity of purpose that marked the Paris Accord.

Even taking into account all the commitments made by governments, we are still on track for 2.4°C of global temperature rise – way beyond the 1.5°C required.



*Euan's Airbnb in Liverpool was just off Penny Lane!*

However, some good things were achieved. The pledge to end deforestation by 2030 was one. Equally unexpected was the deal on curbing methane emissions (a more potent greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>) previously unaddressed at COPs past. Another result was a financial one, launched by Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England. Data suggests that £96.6tr worth of assets – in theory, at least – is now managed in accordance with the goal to transition to a low-carbon economy, by the 450 members of the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero.

My hope is that our elected representatives will take note of the willingness of people of faith to act, and will commit to the even bolder action that is required to reduce our carbon footprint in line with the Paris climate ambitions. Churches are willing to act – now we need strong action on the part of government and industry and business.

So, where to from here? We all need to maintain the pressure for change; and whilst the UK holds the COP Chair until COP27 in Egypt, we all have the opportunity to influence our own government to match pledges with action. I won't be cycling to COP27, but I will be doing something.

At the age of 75, I appreciate that I may not live to witness the worst effects of climate change on the world and its people. However, I am concerned for all children and grandchildren. What sort of world are we leaving them? Likewise, I am deeply concerned for those people living in the global south – those least responsible for the climate crisis, and yet who are suffering most from the consequences.

As an ecologist, I also lament the massive loss of wildlife. Nature is essential for the health of planetary ecosystems, for our wellbeing and enjoyment. Wildlife has a right to exist just as much as we humans. My plea to all in positions of authority is this: please hear the cry of the Earth and the cry of the people! Future generations and all manner of species will thank you for your commitment to the radical change that is needed. ■



*Euan in Preston with Wallace and Gromit*



Euan McPhee, an ecologist, Cornish smallholder and environmental volunteer has been a Green Christian member since its earliest days (as Christian Ecology Link). He is a Local Preacher based at Falmouth Methodist Church.

# A prayerful presence

**Catherine Fish** on wrestling with reality

I went to Glasgow to be part of a prayerful presence during COP26, hoping robust and just decisions would be made. The experience of being there has led to a greater sense of personal accountability to “wrestle” with and respond to the climate crisis and the extraordinary times and reality in which we live.

During COP26, my own awareness of the issues, the causes for lament, and tentative reasons for hope, grew. In the space that we in Green Christian shared with Eco-Congregation Scotland, I was energised by meeting with others who carried similar concerns on their hearts. I heard frustration that warnings spoken over a generation ago had not been listened to then, or since, by people and governments and are not being fully listened to now. I heard stories of devastating impacts from climate change and yet I saw a motivating resilience in those bearing witness and advocating for their communities. I also heard about grassroots projects, positive change and sustainable development. Hearing these frustrations, losses and hopes gave me a sense of solidarity, reminding me that all humanity and all Creation, are connected.

Being reflective by nature, I greatly valued standing side by side with those of a more activist nature than my own, and I came to understand more of their passion, concern and commitment. I have since challenged myself to be more “active” and “activist”. Listening to voices of frustration, reflecting a strong sense of lack of control, helped those voices to be heard in some small way. Then in turn, we can together help other voices be heard as we wrestle together. I have faith that the disorientation concerning current crises, experienced by so many of us, can through this empathic solidarity, become transformed little by little to bring trust, grace and hope.

We were privileged to be joined on some days in our Green Christian space, by Pat, from the World Community for Christian Meditation. Taking part in Christian meditation sessions helped instill a greater self-awareness, and alongside that came an increased sense that we are in this time for a purpose. We are called to be the hope, in voice, prayer or action, even in the face of unmet expectations, as



*A rainbow greeted us as we marched through Glasgow*

*Photo credit: Euan McPhee*

**I heard stories of devastating impacts from climate change and yet I saw a motivating resilience in those bearing witness and advocating for their communities.**

were some of the Old Testament prophets (for example, Habakkuk).

As then, we live in an age of temptation by dark forces and “counterfeit gods”. My sense of accountability now calls me to deepen my understanding of the issues, of economic and political conflicts, and how lifestyles, global systems and responsibilities all influence our relationships to one another and to all Creation. Then I can be part of a movement that even when not understanding the full picture, can walk away from those tempting forces, into grace. I have learnt that this will demand a willingness for greater “wrestling” so that deeper and wider transformation and trust can follow. ■



Catherine Fish is one of Green Christian's Way of Life Companions, as well as a worship leader in her local Church. She is an Occupational Therapist in the NHS, gets involved in local and global justice and inequality issues, and is part of a sustainable Co-Housing group.



**Almighty Father,  
whose will is to restore all things  
in your beloved Son, the King of all:  
govern the hearts and minds of those in authority,  
and bring the families of the nations,  
divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin,  
to be subject to his just and gentle rule;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

*Collect for Remembrance Sunday*

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/topical-prayers/prayers-world>

## **Emmanuel**

**O come, O come, and be our God-with-us  
O long-sought With-ness for a world without,  
O secret seed, O hidden spring of light.  
Come to us Wisdom, come unspoken Name  
Come Root, and Key, and King, and holy Flame,  
O quickened little wick so tightly curled,  
Be folded with us into time and place,  
Unfold for us the mystery of grace  
And make a womb of all this wounded world.  
O heart of heaven beating in the earth,  
O tiny hope within our hopelessness  
Come to be born, to bear us to our birth,  
To touch a dying world with new-made hands  
And make these rags of time our swaddling bands.**

**by Malcolm Guite**

*from Sounding the Seasons, Canterbury Press 2012, with the poet's permission.*



# Restoring the sea!

**Revd Jane Bartlett's** Church celebrated good news



*A sea-kelp forest harbours abundant life*

*Photo credit: Shutterstock*

**T**he Good Shepherd on Shoreham Beach is literally by the beach. We are practically on the pebbles and often wonder whether we are the closest church to the sea in the country. Members of the congregation tend to be sea lovers and have been delighted to learn about the Sussex Kelp Restoration Project, happening on the coastline right outside our church.

Kelp is the name given to a group of large seaweeds that form underwater forests, essential for the marine ecosystem. Much of the kelp along the Sussex coast has been destroyed by bottom towed trawling for fish. Successful environmental campaigning (supported by Sir David Attenborough) has resulted in a new bylaw preventing this type of fishing in the waters along part of the coast. In

a pioneering marine rewilding project it is hoped that the kelp will return, and with it all the creatures that live in its forests.



*Church of the Good Shepherd, Shoreham Beach*

*Photo credit: [www.achurchnearyou.com](http://www.achurchnearyou.com)*



Several creatively-minded members of our congregation got together and planned a community art installation project for Creationtide last year to celebrate this good news story. We transformed the walls of our church into a sea kelp forest. The kelp was made by the Church craft group – some was knitted, some was crochet. Some kelp was made from felt or tissue paper glued onto wire frames.

We populated the kelp with a myriad of creatures that might be found in the underwater forest. These were made by children and adults, from within the Church community and beyond. There were jelly fish made from recycled materials, little sculpted sea horses and star fish, a lobster and crab made from collage, and many little paper-drawn creatures. Local artists also contributed framed paintings and prints that had been inspired by the kelp. The exhibition was accompanied by educational materials depicting marine creatures that can breed and live in Sussex kelp.

The exhibition was open every day and it was a wonderful way to connect with the wider community as visitors popped in. Our local pre-school came and explored, stories about the exhibition were widely shared and we made friends with local environmental groups who were pleasantly surprised to find a Church hosting such an exhibition. People got to learn about kelp and how important it is for our seas, as well as how it is a highly effective carbon-sponge.



Photo credit: Jane Bartlett

To accompany the exhibition we had a talk in church one evening from a local organisation called Sussex Underwater. This is a group of divers who have been campaigning for the restoration of the kelp, and also photograph and video the underwater forests for all to see. The church was packed and we were mesmerised to see beautiful video images of the real kelp forests and learn more about this special underwater habitat.

During our harvest festival celebration, we remembered St Francis's famous *Canticle of Creation* and reflected upon how we humans are part of the same earthly family as all God's creatures; we are bonded to each other in relationships deserving of respect and support. ■

For more information about the Sussex Kelp Restoration Project visit <https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/helpourkelp>



Jane Bartlett is the Associate Vicar of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Shoreham Beach and St Mary de Haura, New Shoreham. She is keen to explore how participatory art can be used in a Church context. Both Churches are working towards their silver Eco Church awards.



Photo credit: Jane Bartlett

# Shared vision...

**Karl Schultz** describes a partnership between Green Christian and St Mary's Islington



*Photo credit St Mary's Islington*

St. Mary's Islington reached out in the summer of 2020, asking whether Green Christian wanted help to improve the outcomes of COP26, the international climate conference, by articulating a Christian perspective on the importance of strong steps to address the climate emergency.

The end result was "Why Faith Matters at COP26" an infographic style online resource that was sent to MPs, parliamentary groups and Church leaders.<sup>1</sup> So why did St. Mary's reach out to Green Christian? What was learned, and where is this relationship heading?

St Mary's Mission Giving Committee (MGC) has been striving to understand how it can make a difference in the lives of Church members through giving. It has pro-actively surveyed Church members on their priorities, taking their views into consideration when proposing support for specific charities. For many years, support has been given to a wide variety of high-impact local, national, and international groups. It has helped a local foodbank, and supported refugees in its neighbourhood, a hospital in Gaza, toilet twinning, disaster response, hospice care in Africa, and Children in Need.

Surprisingly, given the high importance of environmental issues in the congregational survey, very little assistance went to environmental work. While the St Mary's EcoChurch group was

progressing in several areas, including improving church energy efficiency and building congregational awareness on the climate crisis, this didn't translate into our mission giving.

The UK presidency of COP26, as a strategically important event to influence through a Christian voice, presented an opportunity to make a specific connection between environmental stewardship and mission giving. So the St. Mary's EcoChurch organiser recommended reaching out to Green Christian. and the result was a grant to support preparation of a briefing document, with the aim of communicating to UK policymakers a Christian perspective on the importance of stronger climate action.

The message and engagement supported is non-partisan, but inspired by Christian faith and doctrine, it is thus deliberately political. It aims to address some fundamental needs for action by the UK government, enabling action by business and communities, and supporting adaptation to the climate disaster for the most vulnerable.

Based on St. Mary's experience, other Churches might like to consider how their unique aims, opportunities and resources might be used in a similar collaboration. We look forward to further engagement between St. Mary's and Green Christian, and finding ways of working together boldly.

Our example could maybe inspire more Churches to be involved in environmental action, in teaching and campaigning for better care for God's Creation. We believe our support has helped raise awareness for both St. Mary's members and those who received and read the briefing document, and also encouraged local Church members to participate in Green Christian's activities and projects.

Could your Church try something similar?  
Should we together? ■



Karl Schultz is a member of St. Mary's Islington and is on its Mission Giving Committee and EcoChurch group. He has worked in the climate change field since 1994; his focus has been on metrics, finance, and assessment of the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities and strategies to adapt to climate change.

<sup>1</sup> see <https://greenchristian.org.uk/why-faith-matters/>



# ...Fruitful collaboration

**Clare Redfern** relates Green Christian's perspective

St Mary's proposal to Green Christian was surprisingly ambitious. As we discussed it at the GC Board, the brief – for a climate policy document that could influence policymakers at COP26 – caused some raised eyebrows. Did we have the relevant expertise, or enough time and energy? But in true Green Christian style, we thought about it, prayed, gulped and said, “Yes!”

In early 2021, a small group of us committed to working on the project via regular online meetings. We set about wondering how we could creatively “tweak” the brief to make it manageable for a small group of non-specialist volunteers with busy lives.

So we called in the experts! We asked respected theologians (including those amongst our members and patrons) to write a personal reflection on their ambitions and hopes for COP26 and beyond, from a Christian perspective. These reflections can be viewed on our website in the COP26 section; they are delightfully individual and inspiring.

We drew on this wisdom as we discussed content for the policy document, which we quickly re-named an “infographic” – an eye-catching document, suitable for viewing online. We planned to use images as much as well-chosen words to convey our message, to create something that could be digested in a few minutes by a busy politician.

The grant of £1,000 from St Mary's enabled us to enlist the help of a graphic designer, Abi Lane, who got busy



A slide from “Why Faith Matters at COP26”

© GreenChristian

suggesting colour schemes, fonts and designs. It also funded software and printing of flyers.

Meanwhile we researched different areas of content. Drawing on the work of reputable think tanks and institutions such as Chatham House, the Government's Climate Change Committee and WWF, we referenced their reports but reduced ideas for sustainable consumption, transport, buildings and other topics to short sentences; this was difficult, of course, as reams of detail and argument had to be omitted.

We aimed to encapsulate the best current thinking on how the UK could move towards a sustainable future, stressing the need for the UK Government to make far more ambitious policy changes. We highlight as well the work of the Church community in many projects, and emphasize the role of hope and prayer and faith in motivating change.

So, has the final product, *Why Faith Matters at COP26*, had any influence? It's hard to say, as who knows what seeds of a new perspective are quietly germinating in its readers' minds or how

our message has reinforced the words from other faith groups?

But we've certainly had a lot of positive feedback from groups and individuals who found it useful: Christians in Parliament, World Vision UK, Bishop Graham Usher, among others. The Conservative Environment Network (CEN) gave us fulsome praise saying it was an “excellent depiction of many of the key arguments ahead of COP” and that they would use it in their work with parliamentarians; they also acknowledged the importance of faith in motivating change around climate change.

This was a key message of the document, that it is not through technology or policy alone that a sustainable future will come about. It is a matter of values and priorities, and our Christian faith speaks profoundly to this. We are immensely grateful that St Mary's Islington trusted us with their brief and believe we rose to the challenge.

We are certainly open to further collaborations, in all sorts of projects, whether from individuals or Church groups, so please do get in touch ([info@greenchristian.org.uk](mailto:info@greenchristian.org.uk)) with your ideas. ■



Clare Redfern is editor of *Green Christian* magazine and was part of the subgroup that produced the infographic: *Why Faith Matters at COP26*

# Rooted and grounded

**Hilary Blake** introduces  
Green Christian's Lent Appeal

**H**ave you planted a seed this Spring? I love gardening, and my favourite bit is planting the seeds – even more than harvesting and eating, although that's a close second! The planting of a seed demonstrates something about the future that you hope to live in. Maybe you don't have a garden or window box, and don't usually sow seeds, but we often value the image of sowing a seed when we do something small that we hope will grow and flourish in the future. 40 years ago, a small group of people began the organisation that has grown to become Green Christian.

The soil in my garden in York is heavy clay. It's fertile and excellent for brassicas; it's also cold and waterlogged in a wet spring, and bakes hard and cracked in a hot dry summer. But once a tiny plant becomes well rooted here, it grows strongly and puts up with being trampled by a toddler, pecked by birds and nibbled by slugs. The soil is home to countless bacteria, fungi and invertebrates; the more I learn about what lies below the surface, the more amazed I am. The complex relationships in the soil sustain life and teach us of God, who is the ground of being.

Green Christian is an organisation rooted and grounded in its members – you! And that's a membership rooted in faith, with a faith grounded in God. This good soil allows good things to grow and flourish from tiny seeds. A relatively small number of faithful people growing together helps the Church to fulfil its vocation to be good news for the whole Creation. The writer to the Church in



Photo credit: Shutterstock

Ephesus prayed that they would be *"rooted and grounded in love"* and know *"Him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly more than we can ask or imagine."*

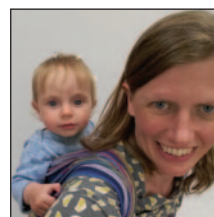
A gift to Green Christian's Lent Appeal this year is a seed sown in good soil to grow and flourish. Maybe your gift will seem tiny like a mustard seed; maybe it will seem big and sturdy like a broad bean. All the gifts together will grow to make a beautiful garden that demonstrates something of our hopes for the future.

We're painfully aware that the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in the UK and beyond. Some people reading this will be better off financially than they were two years ago, while others will be struggling. As a community sharing common concerns, we offer what we can, at a time that we can, trusting that God accepts and transforms our gifts.

This issue of inequality, and how it is bound up with Green Christian's core

concerns, is an important part of our Joy in Enough programme. Your gift to the Lent Appeal will help to expand Joy in Enough, allowing staff to strengthen links with other organisations and providing travel bursaries for people on low incomes to contribute to the Joy in Enough autumn conference.

Even after Lent your gifts will still be welcome. You can make your gift online at <https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/9447#!/DonationDetails> or send a cheque payable to "Green Christian" with a note saying that it is for the Lent Appeal to: Green Christian Treasurer, 35 Kitto Road, London SE14 5TW. ■



Hilary Blake is Green Christian's Development Officer for the Joy in Enough programme. When she's not fundraising or encouraging her children to help with the garden, she volunteers with a cloth nappy library and breastfeeding support group. She is a Local Preacher in the Methodist Church.



## Liminality

by Carrie Newcomer

So much of what we know  
Lives just below the surface.  
Half of a tree  
Spreads out beneath our feet.  
Living simultaneously in two worlds,  
Each half informing and nurturing  
The whole.  
A tree is either and neither  
But mostly both.  
I am drawn to liminal spaces,  
The half-tamed and unruly patch  
Where the forest gives way  
And my little garden begins.  
Where water, air and light overlap  
Becoming mist on the morning pond.  
I like to sit on my porch steps, barn jacket and boots  
In the last long exhale of the day,  
When bats and birds loop in and then out,  
One rising to work,  
One readying for sleep.  
And although the full moon calls the currents,  
And the dark moon reminds me that my best language  
Has always emerged out of the silence,  
It is in the waxing and waning  
Where I most often live,  
Neither here nor there,  
But simply On the way.

There are endings and beginnings  
One emerging out of the other.  
But most days I travel in an ever present  
And curious now.  
A betwixt and between,  
That is almost,  
But not quite,  
The beautiful,  
But not yet.  
I've been learning to live with what is,  
More patient with the process,  
To love what is becoming,  
And the questions that keep returning.  
I am learning to trust  
The horizon I walk toward  
Is an orientation  
Not a destination  
And that I will keep catching glimpses  
Of something great and luminous  
From the corner of my eye.  
I am learning to live where losses hold fast  
And grief lets loose and unravels.  
Where a new kind of knowing can pick up the thread.  
Where I can slide palms with a paradox  
And nod at the dawn,  
As the shadows pull back  
And spirit meets bone.

from *Until Now: New Poems* by Carrie Newcomer © 2021 Available Light Publishing, with permission



# So what is the Green Christian Way of Life Community?

**George Dow** Co-Chair of Green Christian explains



Tregonigie Woodland, Cornwall

Photo credit: Euan McPhee

It all started with the smallest seed of an idea, when a few of us wondered about offering our members the option to form and participate in a Rule or Way of Life as a dispersed community. This would be something quite different from all the other things Green Christian then provided – and continue to provide – conferences, retreats, workshops, campaigns, online resources, local groups and more.

In May 2015 around 40 of us gathered at a weekend retreat at Ringsfield Hall in Suffolk to explore this idea – and from that weekend, the Way of Life was born. It is now continually developing in the resources offered and the mutual encouragement shared. All Green Christian members, for whom care of God's Creation is a fundamental outworking of their faith, are invited to join.

Many Christian communities have Rules or Ways, at the heart of which is a set of spiritual disciplines or practices to assist believers in living out their faith in a more intentional way; many include Creation care as one of their elements. Some Green Christian members are

also members of these communities. So why have a specifically Green Christian Way of Life?

In Green Christian we considered that concerns about climate change and loss of biodiversity were so important – and felt so deeply by so many people – that it would be appropriate to have our own Way of Life, with its spiritual practices exclusively focused on justice for all of Creation. This would offer a structured approach and deeper engagement with Creation care, and a supportive community, particularly for members who felt isolated in their Churches.

We invite the Way of Life members to follow four disciplines: **Daily Prayer & Devotions, Living Gently on the Earth, Public Witness, and Encouragement.** “Companions” are those who have made a commitment to follow these; “Explorers” are those who have expressed an interest, receive resources and are considering their next step.

The four disciplines draw on many resources that are already freely

available to Green Christian members. For example, there is the Prayer Diary, published each month and also available by daily email, along with other prayer resources on our website. Our leaflets such as *Nine Ways to Live Gently on the Earth*, and LOAF (principles for meals) Local, Organic, Animal-Friendly and Fairly Traded are full of useful ideas. Public Witness could mean committing to specific action such as participating in projects or campaigns. An example might be engaging in Green Christian's “Joy in Enough”, a challenge to current economic thinking.

Encouragement, developed either in pairs or larger regional groups is a distinctive and very important aspect of the Way of Life. Companions are



An encouraging chat between Companions



dedicated to help each other grow in active and effective Creation-nurturing spirituality in a way that is personally authentic to them and the context in which they live, work and worship. Companions can make their own arrangements to meet, online or in person, to hear each others' stories and support each other in their Creation-centred faith walk. In short, we aim to offer "formation" – nurture for radical Christian ecological discipleship.

Further support, provided to both Companions and Explorers, takes the form of monthly letters and Zoom gatherings which cover various topics that have included: the importance of art and poetry in our response to the climate crisis; moving from the subversive into the mainstream; prayer and encouragement; the significance of stories; the role of non-violent direct action in protest; what living gently on the Earth means for you and, most recently, keeping resilient after COP26. There is an annual gathering, usually in person, though this year we held a reduced, but still splendid, Zoom gathering.

We currently have 67 Companions and 14 regional groups. To find out more about the Way of Life, please visit [www.greenchristian.org.uk/way/](http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/way/) where you will find links to resources, including video recordings of talks. Any GC members who would like to join our Way of Life Community will be made most welcome by contacting me: [georgedow@greenchristian.org.uk](mailto:georgedow@greenchristian.org.uk). No forms to fill in, an e-mail will suffice! ■



George Dow is co-Chair of Green Christian and co-ordinator of the Way of Life Community.

## New Green Christian Posters

With this issue of GC magazine we have sent our members a free set of six brand-new posters – fresh, modern and relevant. Please be imaginative in how you use them. You can stick them in your windows, display in your church and share with your friends and neighbours. If you only have space for one poster in church you can ring the changes and have a new poster every couple of months for a year.

Need bigger posters? Send £9 (or more) and we'll send you a larger A3 set, or £5 for another A4 set. Please send your order to: [info@greenchristian.org.uk](mailto:info@greenchristian.org.uk) and make a donation:

- Online by going to <https://greenchristian.org.uk/about> and clicking "donate"
- BACS - The Co-operative Bank, Gloucester 2 Branch, Sort code 08-90-54, acc. no. 70329203
- Or by cheque to: Green Christian Treasurer, 35 Kitto Road, London SE14 5TW.

We have also given our printed leaflets a new look. As in-person meetings return and church leaflet racks are again in use, we invite you to order some. Go to the Resources page on our website to see them.

## Green Christian Conference 7th/8th October, 2022

Green Christian's conference this October is inspired by the Joy in Enough project. The title is *"Building back greener? Christian perspectives on the future of our economy, money and work"*. It will offer thought-provoking talks on creating a sustainable economy with opportunities for bringing questions and concerns.

All are welcome to attend. Our speaker, joining us by Zoom on Friday 7th October, is environmentalist and writer, **Paul Kingsnorth**, founder of the Dark Mountain project.

This will be followed by an in-person event in the heart of Birmingham at The Priory Rooms, Birmingham B4 6AF, from 10.30am to 4pm on Saturday 8th October. Speakers on Saturday will be:

**Professor Christopher Southgate**, scientist and theologian

**Grace Blakeley**, economics and politics commentator

There will also be workshops and discussion, opportunities for informal get-togethers and networking, and taster sessions of Plenty!

The conference will be encouraging participants to think about the economy of the future, likely developments, and Christian perspectives on these. Workshops include: Growth and Debt; Economic Justice; Consumption and Advertising; Inequality and Joy in Enough's "Plenty!" programme. It will be a great opportunity for people to meet and



talk to each other again. Visit our website to see how to book a place.

Green Christian's Joy in Enough Project started in 2014 to explore alternatives to the current economic system. It draws together ideas from economists, environmentalists and theologians. It considers links between the way we run our economies, our consumption of goods and services and the climate change and biodiversity crises.



Photo credit: JunCTionS, licensed under CC BY 2.0

## Deep Waters

Deep Waters is part of the Borrowed Time "Pastoral care in the climate emergency" project. Over the past two years Green Christian has been running this project, an 8-week journey in which participants explore their emotional responses to climate change and ecological destruction. It is designed for both online and in-person groups. It has now run four times (and was trialled in 2020 also), and those taking part have found it helpful and empowering.

In small breakout groups, which remain the same each week, participants have confidential and mutually supportive

discussions, using a weekly PDF as a starting point. The PDFs contain a variety of resources: scripture, poetry, images, links to scientific research or journalism, music and more. Participants are encouraged to keep a journal, and to take part in a suggested reflective exercise. In the main group, there is feedback, further reflection, and prayer.

Deep Waters is grounded in Christian faith, with a keen eye on the scientific realities of the climate and ecological emergencies. It aims to bring people from grief to active hope, via topics exploring extinction, wisdom, and justice, amongst others. Do join us online – or consider setting up your own group where you are. Please see the website for more details

(<https://greenchristian.org.uk/deep-waters-a-project-of-borrowed-time/>) or contact Deborah Tomkins at [deborah.tomkins@greenchristian.org.uk](mailto:deborah.tomkins@greenchristian.org.uk)

## Climate webpage on the GC website

The next United Nations Climate summit, COP27, will take place in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, from 7-18 November 2022. The UK is still leading global climate negotiations up to COP27. COP15, the biodiversity COP, will be a face-to-face meeting in Kunming, China, from 25 April-8 May 2022. Green Christian's COP26 page on the website has been renamed **Climate** and contains information and inspiration for prayer and protest for both this year's UN conferences.

## Greenbelt 2022

Thinking of going to Greenbelt this year? The arts, justice and faith festival takes place on August Bank holiday at Broughton Hall in Northamptonshire – at least we certainly hope so! Green Christian will be hosting a stall as usual and if you would like to volunteer on the stall for a couple of hours please get in touch with Ruth Jarman

([info@greenchristian.org.uk](mailto:info@greenchristian.org.uk)). Or just come and say hello when you're there!



Photo credit: Greenbelt.org.uk

## Green Christian On the Road ...in Colchester

A successful gathering for those from the Colchester area interested in finding out more about Green Christian took place last October. The keynote speaker was environmental economist Shilpita Mathews of the Young Christian Climate Network who gave two excellent interactive presentations: **Climate Crisis and Youth Activism**, and **Climate, Finance and Divestment**. There were several workshops including talks on Way of Life, Joy in Enough, measuring your Carbon Footprint, Biodiversity for gardens, and Biodiversity for churchyards.

The inaugural meeting of the Colchester GC Local Group takes place on Monday evening 23rd May. The guest speaker is the Revd Canon Imogen Nay, Canon for Discipleship & Evangelism at Chelmsford Cathedral and a keen environmentalist. All are welcome, so do come along. Details from Howard Gardner at [indexprint@btinternet.com](mailto:indexprint@btinternet.com)

Interested in joining a Green Christian Local Group in your area? Contact Isobel Murdoch [isobelmurdoch@greenchristian.org.uk](mailto:isobelmurdoch@greenchristian.org.uk)

Would you like to run a Green Christian On the Road Day where you live? See the website under the "Activities" tab.



## Bearing Witness

**Isobel Murdoch**, our Local Groups co-ordinated reports on recent activity

inevitably, two years of pandemic and restrictions have taken their toll, and some of Green Christian's local groups will not be reopening. Others have weathered the storm.

**Stroud** Green Christian group held a "Space to Talk, Space to Think" session during Great Big Green Week last autumn. Attendees were guided through a "generative dialogue" process, with a focus on attentive listening to each other, an opportunity to express feelings about the climate crisis. It's not often that we get the chance to focus on feelings, rather than give or receive information or engage in argument and debate. Many mentioned being influenced by their children and their fears for the future world they are leaving to their grandchildren. Other key thoughts included: "how can we make best use of whatever time we have left on Earth to do what is right and good to care for Creation? How can we learn from indigenous communities who have been living in harmony with the Earth for ever?"

How can we care for and support each other through these anxious times?"

As November neared, the focus obviously turned to COP26, with groups marking the summit in different ways before and during the fortnight. For example, members of Green Christian's **North Wales** group gathered outside Wrexham RC Cathedral to urge the Diocese to divest from fossil fuels, an action which was reported by the *Independent Catholic News*. As you will see from the photographs, Green Christian **Worcester** held a Walk Of Witness from St George's Catholic Church to Worcester Cathedral on 6 November, an opportunity to pray, walk, reflect and sing on the COP26 Day Of Action. Members of the latest group to affiliate to Green Christian, Hope In Action in **St Albans**, took part in local action with Friends of the Earth during COP26, and also travelled to London to join with Tearfund for a Global Day of Justice event.



Worcester Local Group

with the city council's climate work. Green Christian's existing presence in **Sheffield** is developing with occasional meetings planned.

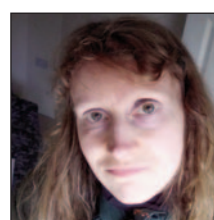
One Church involved with the **St Albans** Hope In Action group ran Green Christian's Plenty! programme in the autumn, which it found "constructive", "hopeful" and "biblical", and "willing to explore the big picture". You might like to look at Hope In Action's own website to learn more about this very active group.



Church leaders in Worcester hand a letter to the Mayor on the COP26 Walk of Witness

Now, as COP26 recedes into the background and we move towards future summits, lobbying is continuing. **Stroud** group met with their MP in January. **Worcester** group has also met with their MP since COP26 to discuss the Government's actions and commitments – and is cooperating

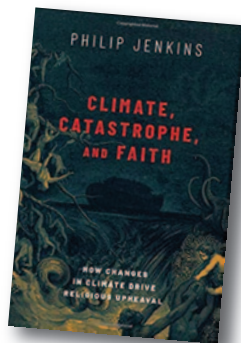
As **Worcester's** Walk of Witness demonstrated, bearing witness is integral to local groups, as they embody green, Christian awareness in their communities. Thank you so much to all who bear witness, or have borne witness, in this way. And as the pandemic hopefully retreats, could you consider starting a new group or acting as a local contact? ■



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## Climate, Catastrophe, and Faith – How Changes in Climate Drive Religious Upheaval

Philip Jenkins  
September 2021  
Oxford University Press  
ISBN 978-0-19-750621-9  
257 pages  
RRP £29.95



Climate variation and extreme weather events have been a constant throughout history, as have religious upheavals and political turmoil. Whilst the latter two phenomena have been bread and butter topics for historians, it is only comparatively recently that the role of the climate in human affairs has been recognised as of fundamental importance. In this book Jenkins seeks to demonstrate that from the earliest times marked shifts in climate have contributed substantially to disruptive changes in social structures and religious beliefs. His message is that there are valuable lessons from history about the range of possible religious responses to the changes in the climate already upon us, changes which are set to become more damaging and severe.

The subtitle of the book led me to expect a work which explored the intertwined fields of theology, psychology, and sociology. Instead, what we have is a gallop through world political, social and climate history during the Common Era, alongside brief descriptions of the consequential emergence of religious movements and trends, mainly during periods of stress and disruption. With such a huge field to encompass, there is little depth of analysis of individual phenomena, which can make for a slightly repetitive and frustrating read. Without looking them all up, it has to be assumed that the very extensive references in the endnotes (there is no bibliography) provide the evidence for the claims of the text. They certainly provide a

valuable resource in themselves.

Having said that, it was salutary for me to learn the extent to which global temperatures have fluctuated in the last two millennia, although Jenkins is careful to point out that the cause of that is down to natural rather than human activity. Nonetheless, it does seem clear that times of benign climate, for instance during the “high Middle Ages” in Europe, tend to promote expressions of religious faith which might be characterised as more stable and rationally-tilted: Aquinas being the exemplar here. Perhaps times of security and prosperity make it easier to explain life in logically reassuring ways. By contrast, what Jenkins calls “a real sense of existential panic,” for which disastrous weather seems often one of the triggers, has in the past prompted scapegoating, pogroms, witch-hunts and large scale violence in the name of religion. It has also, according to some contemporary scholarship, been a factor in enduring religious change such as the Reformation and the “Great Awakening” in the USA starting in the late eighteenth century.

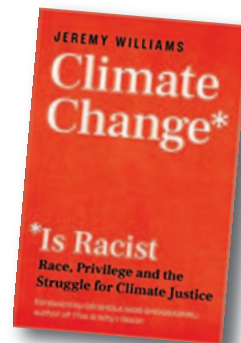
The penultimate chapter provides an overview of the areas of the world, mainly in equatorial regions, that are currently experiencing extreme climate-related stresses. Jenkins believes that further violent conflict is almost inevitable in these regions, which, he predicts, will produce “new religious movements or revivals within existing faiths”.

Jenkins’ broad-brush approach shows clearly how humanity’s attempts throughout history to find meaning in the events of existence – their religious faiths – are inseparable from the context of their climate. His book confirms that contemporary believers in all traditions can expect their own faith to be profoundly challenged as climate change tightens its grip.

Duncan Forbes

## Climate Change Is Racist: Race, Privilege and the Struggle for Climate Justice

Jeremy Williams  
June 2021  
Icon Books  
ISBN: 978-1785787751  
208 pages  
RRP £8.99 (paperback)



This book was published in the summer of 2021 and would have made excellent preparatory reading for anyone wanting to make sense of some of the behind the headlines negotiations at the COP26 gathering in Glasgow. Much of the coverage of that event focused on what was eye and ear catching and many of the representatives from countries already reeling under the impact of climate change rarely made centre stage. The COP26 Coalition, which united indigenous activists, civil society campaigners, trade unionists and many others did sterling lobbying work to keep climate justice centre stage but their voice was rarely heard in the mainstream coverage. When you have read Jeremy Williams’ book you will begin to see that this was no accident but reflects the biases built into many of the debates around climate change.

This book is an excellent introduction to the issues at stake. Jeremy Williams says in his preface that he wanted to keep it short and he is true to his word. However, this is not at the expense of a careful and well-crafted presentation of the issues. He is clear that climate justice is the great moral challenge of our time and he makes a powerful case for it. The book opens with some statistics – enough and sufficiently referenced to be convincing but not overwhelming, which tackle the question of who causes climate change and who suffers from it. Two striking maps at the beginning stake out the territory, highlighting the huge imbalance between those countries who produce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and those



countries that are most vulnerable to climate change. The maps suggest that climate change is predominantly caused by the richest and suffered by the poorest – the economic injustice of climate change. But the maps also reveal that those most vulnerable to climate change are people of colour, whereas those who cause climate change are white. This is the racial injustice of climate change.

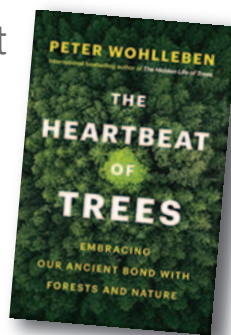
He tells us about the different shapes of racism – individual, institutional and structural – in clear and unambiguous terms, making it clear that it is structural racism that defines the racism of climate change; not any particular group of individuals making conscious choices or decisions but rather how the system is hardwired. In equally brief but incisive chapters, he traces the roots of climate injustice through slavery, colonialism and empire and shows how climate change further reinforces the existing patterns of inequality and disadvantage. Intersectionality is the concept used for describing what Williams calls

overlapping patterns of disadvantage and he helpfully unpacks what this term means and how it can be useful in deepening our understanding.

Williams also writes about ways ahead; for example, struggles being united like the Green New Deal / Sunrise movement or in this country the recognition of the intertwining of climate justice and migrant justice. He has no patience for pessimism – that is an unaffordable luxury; in the last chapters he gives ways that we can get informed and get involved. One way would be to read this excellent book.

Jonathan Morris

## The Heartbeat of Trees: Embracing Our Ancient Bond with Forests and Nature



Peter Wohlleben  
June 2021  
Greystone Books  
ISBN 978-1771646895  
264 pages  
RRP £19.99 (hardback)

Some years ago I could be seen in Spring with a stethoscope on smooth barked trees listening for the “heart beat” sound within the tree. (You really can hear one). So I was completely caught by the title of this book and I am glad I was. In a conversational style, Wohlleben introduces us to the world from the trees’ point of view and to all the benefits we can gain from walking in a forest. He initially invites us to increase all our senses in the forest, the community of trees: to increase our sight range by looking to the tops of trees, to taste, to listen, to feel. I am looking forward to trying young beech and oak leaves in a salad this spring.

Wohlleben explores some scientific discussion around trees, and challenges the view that humans are the pinnacle of evolution, pointing out how very much longer trees have been around

than humans and the fact that they managed just fine without us. He sees the forest as a whole organism, and explains the interactions between trees, though these are on a much slower and longer timescale than our conversations. The role of fungus and the trees’ methods of defence from it, is especially fascinating. It is an outcome that benefits us too, when we walk in a forest of pine trees, because the air is germ free as the trees give off phytoncides, a plant antibiotic, as a defence against fungal spores. This is of particular benefit to those with allergies or inflammation. We are introduced to research that underlines the many ways in which trees benefit our health. It was fascinating to read of the Japanese research that discovered an increase in cancer killing cells and anti cancer proteins in those who walked regularly in a forest.

Wohlleben defines the differences between a natural wild forest and human managed woodland, suggesting that “forest” is kept as a term for wild forest, the rest being called “plantations” or “managed spaces”. He pleads for wider recognition of the benefits of forest for the environment, and the potential for healing the damage to the climate, and also describes some local action.

This is a book very well worth reading, and reading more than once. It contains so much interesting information that you won’t remember it all, but will wish that you could. I strongly recommend it, and it is a book I will now be giving as presents this year.

Chris Polhill

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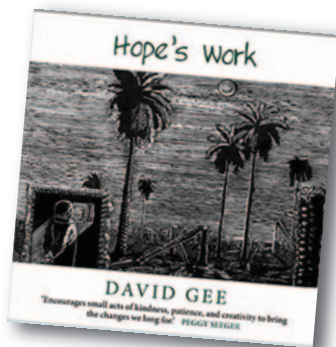
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Leaving a legacy gift to Green Christian will help ensure the work we do lives on. When writing or amending your Will you need to make a note of our official name (which is still CEL), our registered address and our charity number: Christian Ecology Link, 35 Kitto Road, London SE14 5TW. Charity No. 328744.



## Hope's Work. Facing the future in an age of crises

David Gee  
June 2021  
Darton, Longman and Todd  
ISBN 978-1-913657-03-1  
160 pages  
RRP £9.99 (paperback)

As Christians, and as those who have a deep reverence and care for the Earth as God's Creation, surely we have hope? Yet post-COP26, with a rapidly diminishing trust in politicians, realistic about the self-serving agenda of big business, and recognising so many people's capacity for denial in various forms, honestly how can we have hope? David Gee has written a beautiful meditation on hope, beginning with a plain acknowledgement of the economic violence in our world which seems to make it impossible. He tells us stories each illustrating how it can be possible to accept the fact of violence and then move through it to find the promise of life.

Gee is a peace activist who has written about global security and peace education with a particular concern for the continuing inclusion of children and young people in armed forces around the world. He lives on a boat, moving around Oxford. For him Creation is a place of promise, imbued with life which deserves to be loved. This book invites us to consider various practical approaches to hope as the choice to treat life as if it matters, in the present – and even without knowing the future.

It begins with a version of an ancient story, a Babylonian creation myth known as Enuma Elish. This tells of a man-god who proudly slays the feared mother-dragon to impose order in the name of peace, but who actually primes

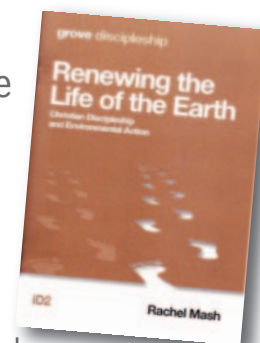
history for violence. So it can be read as a kind of foundational myth of Western civilisation, reminding us that we need to recognise its norms of violence when we start to think about hope.

Many human vignettes then flesh out the message. A pioneering naturalist shows how we must move through all violations of the Earth to honour its intrinsic worth in love. A young Libyan man, jailed for his peace work, witnesses to the promise of life he found in simply watching the sun rise each morning from his cell window. A British soldier whose special task in the Iraq war was to destroy ordinary people's homes at dead of night now tours schools in the UK teaching about the true nature of war. Each shows how the script of violence can be re-written through patience and small actions – and how there are pivotal choices between death and life.

As Christians committed to the wellbeing of the Earth it may well be the chapter on disillusionment which speaks most powerfully to us. For this shows how our initial hope has to be "threshed" by the violent realities of the world before we can recognise the hopes remaining, which can indeed translate into our own active choices for life rather than death. The book's cover is an engraving by Emily Johns depicting the US bombing of Baghdad in an image that holds despair and hope together without flinching. "Once all the chaff is threshed away, real hopes remain like a few grains in the hand ... all you need to say – is, 'The earth is alive'" (p.70).

Hope's Work concludes with a wonderful re-telling of the Emmaus story from Luke's Gospel. It becomes an even more enigmatic account of two disciples sharing their experience of hope now defeated by the killing of their friend. But as they walk they find hope in each other, and they realise that their only true road is back into the city.

Andrew Norman



## Renewing the Life of the Earth: Christian Discipleship and Environmental Action

Rachel Mash  
July 2021  
Grove Books  
ISBN: 978 1 78827 179 0  
28 pages  
RRP: £3.95

This booklet is the latest title in the Grove Discipleship Series, intended to help lay and ordained Church leaders engage with contemporary issues. That it is only 28 pages will certainly help achieve that aim, as will the very reasonable price and inspiring tone. Church leaders should find this a more than useful introduction to explain why they and their congregations should see environmental action as a key dimension of Christian discipleship. The author, Rachel Mash is Co-ordinator of the Environmental Network of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa and works with the Green Anglicans Movement which exists in 12 countries in Africa. She is able to draw on this practical experience to help make the link between faith and environmental concern, giving several examples from the African perspective.

Chapter One, The Urgency of Caring for the Whole Creation, sketches out the context humanity finds itself in 2021. Coronavirus of course gets a mention as a devastating example of the destruction of ecosystems, as do climate change, biodiversity loss, and plastic pollution. Against this background, Mash asks "how disciples of Jesus Christ ... can learn to live in God, for humanity and in harmony with Creation?" The conclusion is that "a concern for Creation must become mainstreamed as part of our day-to-day faith, our life and our witness."

Chapters two and three take this concept of concern for Creation into



biblical theology, asking respectively what the New and Old Testaments say on the subject. Mash concentrates on some key theological issues, and New Testament ones covered include the Incarnation, the Kingdom of God, the Cross and the New Earth. The treatment of these is necessarily brief but certainly not shallow – Moltmann and N.T. Wright are quoted. Mash has a laser beam accuracy in teasing out how the contemporary ecological crisis relates to these key elements of Christian doctrine. I particularly liked her engagement with “Escapist theology”, where the Earth is seen by some as disposable as we approach the “end-times” heralded by Coronavirus and climate change.

Readers will find the comprehensive references throughout the book very helpful. The majority of the 51 references are accessible on the internet. Because of this, in my view, the book is much more than an introductory primer. It is more a resource to brief committed Christians who want to know how their beliefs relate to concern for and action on the environment. The scope of the references should certainly help bring such people up to speed with contemporary green Christian thinking. Chapters four and five deal respectively with lifestyle changes of individuals and congregations, and the “big issues”, with an emphasis on campaigning. Mash provides references from various secular and Christian green campaigns. As an Anglican, she finishes powerfully by reminding us of the Fifth Mark of Mission, and of the fact that that the next 10 years can change the course of human history.

Stephen Retout

The Day the World Stops Shopping: How ending consumerism gives us a better life and a greener world.

J.B. Mackinnon  
June 2021  
Bodley Head  
ISBN 9781847925480  
pages  
RRP £20 hardback (paperback published June 2022)

*The Day the World Stops Shopping* is described as a thought experiment, exploring the dilemma between the destruction of consumerism and the destruction of the global economy that depends upon it. It is both a geographical and a philosophical journey, exploring many cultures and ideas.

The Prologue begins in the Kalahari Desert in Namibia among the Ju ‘hoansi people and their “running below capacity” lifestyle. This contrasts starkly with North America and Europe, where the “greening” of consumerism has not led to a decline in consumption. *First Days*, explores consumption decrease and its impact on others, particularly in poorer countries which produce the goods we consume and which bear the devastating effects of production in environmental destruction, ill-health and worker exploitation. He analyses the concept of “sabbath”, concluding that Sunday closing would result in a 15% drop in shopping time and hence emissions, as well as an experience of slowed time.

The next section, *Collapse*, looks at modelling that predicts what happens when we stop shopping. A fascinating chapter on The Finnish Depression of the 1990s describes how Finns adapted without societal collapse. This is contrasted with the Soviet Union’s economic and social hardships, although there too, many adapted to self-sufficiency. *Adaptation* examines durability versus “inbuilt obsolescence”,



exploring both fast fashion in Bangladesh and the dilemmas of high-end ethical clothing producers. The circular economy and recycled materials are part of the answer, with enough end-of-use textiles available, that oil and cotton need not be used again. Long-term family business models, prevalent in Japan, suggest that values and continuity are more important than expansion, while organisations like Every One Every Day in Dagenham help forge participatory identities beyond that of consumer. Mackinnon analyses system-led inconspicuous consumption, where ‘normal life’ means changing expectations of comfort, cleanliness and convenience; new norms of higher consumption. He examines “moral licensing” where good behaviour justifies the bad, such as fuel efficiency leading to more driving. “Sufficiency behaviour” he suggests, is the arrival at a sense of “enoughness”.

The final section, *Transformation*, paints a hopeful picture of a world that has given up on over-consumption, with more habitats for wild things and more wonder for us. Mackinnon looks in detail at what happens when an area, like the Japanese island of Sado, becomes less populous and affluent, with Nature thriving and people living contented lives. A return to the Ju ‘hoansi and their simpler, sharing lifestyle, holds out hope for us all. The author’s Epilogue details the changes he has made in his own life but warns that de-consumption requires change beyond the individual, including Lifespan labelling, job-sharing, redistribution of wealth, a basic income and technological solutions. We have the means to solve the consumer dilemma.

This book is a truly wonderful read, a real page-turner that was impossible to put down. It is non-fiction, but reads like a picaresque travel tale, full of wonderful characters and interesting places. It is not a Christian book as such, but is filled with humility, humanity and a deep spirituality. I highly commend it as a must-read for 2022, particularly for GC members involved with Joy in Enough, for whom this could be the go-to handbook.

Linda Wickham

Please email our Review Editor, Tanya Jones [tanyaajones@greenchristian.org.uk](mailto:tanyaajones@greenchristian.org.uk) with your ideas for future reviews, and also if you would like to join our regular reviewers’ list.

# Green Christian Conference

The Priory Rooms, Birmingham B4 6AF

Oct 7th (evening online) Oct 8th (in-person), 2022

*“Building back greener? Christian perspectives on the future of our economy, money and work”*

## Speakers:

Paul Kingsnorth, writer and environmentalist

Grace Blakeley, economics journalist and author

Christopher Southgate, theologian and scientist

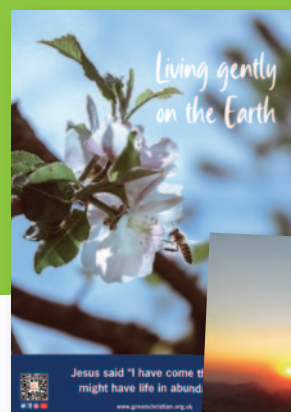
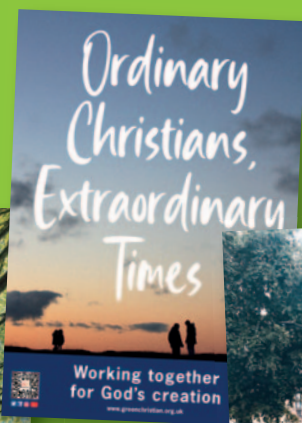
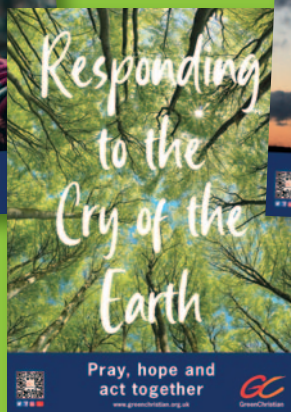


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