

Finding our feet after 1.5°C

Green Christian trustee **Paul Bodenham** introduces our 2025 conference, which will explore how churches can build climate resilience.

In 2018 a coachful of us gathered on the cathedral forecourt at Katowice in Poland. Guided by hand-signals from the portico, we formed ourselves into a figure saying “1.5C” for the cameras. We were there for COP24 with the development agency CAFOD. We spelt out with our bodies the target of the Paris Agreement and all campaign groups at the time – to keep global warming below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Six COPs later, and we’re already there – the EU Copernicus programme found that 2024 was the first year to exceed 1.5°C. Where do campaigners go now? Without the 1.5°C standard to rally round it is much harder to mobilise people to hold their governments to account. The Paris Agreement target has not yet been breached in theory as it looks at long-term trends. But annual global emissions are still climbing and fossil fuel companies are abandoning any pretence of transition to renewables.

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Last year’s UN “emissions gap” report found that the world is on track for nearly 3°C of warming by 2100 – well within the lifetime of today’s young people. In coming centuries, sea levels are expected to rise 2 metres or more, forcing millions to higher ground. Meanwhile if the Atlantic current which drives the Gulf Stream fails, the UK faces brutal food insecurity, for which no plan exists.

You probably know the stakes, and find the socially-constructed silence around climate change as incomprehensible as I do. If you’ve raised the topic at a dinner party, you’ll know what I mean. For the last two years Green Christian has been a member of the Climate Majority Project, which aims to break that silence by bringing out into the open what polling consistently tells us – that people do indeed care deeply, but feel obliged to keep their feelings to themselves. The CMP aims to connect up that “climate majority” already visible in local and sectoral action and demonstrate it at national scale in a way that should be politically irresistible.

Adaptation: surrender or salvation?

We now have to accept an unpalatable truth. Climate campaigning, and even non-violent direct action, have failed to achieve the action necessary to keep humanity safe. For sure, we must continue to advocate rapid cuts to carbon emissions; every fraction of a degree of warming we now avoid will reduce the risks we and our descendants face, so there can be no room for defeatism. But if we care about climate, we must also plan for that failure to continue. We now have not one job as campaigners but two – mitigation *and* adaptation. That is why the Climate Majority Project has launched the UK’s first national campaign on climate adaptation: “SAFER” which stands for “Strategic Adaptation For Emergency Resilience”.

The launch of SAFER on 9th July 2025 coincided with the Mass Lobby of Parliament. Through it Green Christian joins numerous grassroots organisations, as diverse as Flooded People, Retrofit Balsall Heath and MP Watch, to ensure that climate adaptation becomes a national priority – practical, properly funded, and locally led. As the campaign makes clear, this is not about “giving up” on climate breakdown, but helping communities face the reality of it and so be galvanised to take action together.

Perhaps the greatest adaptation challenge is to secure equality, both internationally and locally. We have known for decades how lower-income countries in the global South suffer most from climate change. But it is no longer just a problem “over there”. Risks are creeping up on the UK, for instance as flood-prone neighbourhoods become ever more costly to insure and heatwaves threaten those in the frailest health.

Since 2019, Green Christian’s *Deep Waters* programme has been helping people navigate environmental breakdown and come to terms with the ethical, moral and emotional injuries involved. We also offer *Cloud and Fire* for those in church ministry exploring questions like: What does my vocation mean on the brink of catastrophe? How do I preach honestly about the risks we face? What new pastoral responses do people need?

As systems destabilise and societies face unprecedented risks, the social capital which faith communities offer will be increasingly valuable. Church halls will be called on as



Polling tells us that people care deeply about climate change

Image credit: Helen Marshall, The People's Picture

emergency reception centres; with reduced harvests and rising prices, church food banks will face rising demand; love of neighbour will be a matter not just of decency but of solidarity in the face of common risk, and of shared resistance to the false comforts of populism.

Biblical hope – courage, solidarity and action

Perhaps the deepest challenge today is to reframe hope for a post 1.5°C world. As far as climate stability is concerned a “better world” will not come in our lifetimes – except perhaps for the wealthiest. Biblical hope is not a quest for private resilience, privilege or progress, or an exercise in the suppression of fear, but about detachment from all these things. From the outside it presents as courage, solidarity and action.

On 15th November, our 2025 Annual Members Meeting in Peterborough will explore how churches can help build this resilience. Our keynote speaker will be Rupert Read: philosopher, environmentalist and co-director of the Climate Majority Project and its SAFER campaign. Jo Chamberlain and Adrian Fox, from the Church of England Environment

Programme, will share their work preparing Anglican congregations for climate resilience. Bringing perspectives from pastoral care and mission will be pioneer minister Revd Vanessa Elston, who co-led our retreat at the Othona Community in Bradwell last year.

See the GC News pages for more details. This will not be a one-off event, but the start of a journey which Green Christian will help to lead, enabling churches to grow as sites of hope in a world of unravelling certainties. As the title has it, we will be “building on the rock”, that underpinning of solidarity and strength which our faith invites us to discover. Climate adaptation is a defining challenge for the future of Christian mission. Let’s rise to it. ■



Paul Bodenham is a Green Christian Trustee and coordinates our *Borrowed Time* project. Beyond Green Christian, he is development lead for Cadence Roundtable, which helps professionals and policy makers plan for climate breakdown. He also runs Caritas, the social action agency of the Catholic Diocese of Nottingham.