



PRCDT Environment Strategy

Prepared by Interim Head of Charity, Caritas

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This paper seeks to address the gap between the diocesan intention to engage in environmental work to fulfil the imperative to be “stewards of creation” and the ad hoc and largely un-coordinated nature of the current individual and group action to date.

An agreed diocesan strategy with specific aims and action plans will both direct and confirm the work of all members of the diocese who are engaged in environment work.

Such an agreed strategy will also allow the diocese to take its place with confidence alongside other dioceses in England and Wales and in addition alongside other external organisations who work in the field.

‘Our Diocese has a ten-year Evangelisation Strategy called “Bringing People Closer to Jesus Christ through His Church.”

Care of creation, living simply and promoting a Catholic ecology comes under Priority Four “Becoming Outward-looking Servants”: that “our parish and school communities become outward-facing service-centres, beacons of mission, dialogue and service to all around, especially to the poor, the homeless and those in need.” The task is to promote the conversion of individuals and families, faithful and clergy through the spirituality of an integral Catholic eco-theology.

This begins at home, in gardens, in local food and life-style choices such as the use of water, meat consumption and travel.’

*Bishop Philip
from LIVING LAUDATO SI: YOUR PLANET AND YOUR PARISH February 2021*

1. Introduction

Environmental concerns, and in particular concerns relating to climate change, represent high profile issues within many communities including the Catholic Church.

Catholics have an important role to play in the ongoing climate change crisis and the accompanying debates as it is the combination of pragmatic actions to reverse climate change together with the understanding of the theological basis for those actions that gives committed Catholics the “integral Catholic eco-theology” to bring about change to our world in our joint and inseparably linked ecological and social justice crises.

Pope Francis in his second encyclical letter *Laudato Si...* speaks to us about care for our common home.

“LAUDATO SI’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.

Laudato Si was not written in isolation, instead it follows on from the teachings of Pope Paul VI, Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict

In 1971, Blessed Pope Paul VI referred to the ecological concern as “a tragic consequence” of unchecked human activity: “Due to an ill-considered exploitation of nature, humanity runs the risk of destroying it and becoming in turn a victim of this degradation”

In Saint John Paul II’s first encyclical, he warned that human beings frequently seem “to see no other meaning in their natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption”

Pope Benedict XVI likewise proposed “eliminating the structural causes of the dysfunctions of the world economy and correcting models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring respect for the environment”.

“We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

Pope Francis

It is with this theological background and moral imperative that this paper is presented for consideration.

2. Context and Research

Caritas was charged by Bishop Philip with taking on the role of Diocesan environment lead in the Spring of 2021.

An important part of fulfilling this role was the development of an Environment Strategy within the diocese for Trustee approval and adoption by the Diocese.

As preliminary work, a parishioner attitudinal survey and a targeted parish baseline survey were commissioned by Caritas.

- The attitudinal survey, promoted on E-News and within the Parish communications network, gained 168 responses, which is deemed adequate. Results are attached in a separate document.
- The parish survey, which was designed as a targeted sample survey to 30 parishes, gained 1 response.
- The tentative conclusions from these 2 surveys can be summarised as:
 - Parishioners are aware of environmental concerns and active in their own homes
 - Parishioners often rely on their Parish Priest to inform them and motivate them regarding action in the parishes and wider in the community.
 - Environmental issues are not a high priority for Parish Priests given their many other commitments and/or reluctance to complete surveys.

In addition, Caritas within our environmental work over the last five months has gained the following insights:

- Feedback from direct action projects initiated by Caritas together with contact with Laudato Si groups and parishes adopting CAFOD's Living Simply Award have identified a small number of committed and active individuals spread widely across the diocese, with little overlapping work between parishes.
- These identified individuals express concern that they have little perceived support within the diocese while at the same time they describe extensive support for environmental action in groups outside the diocese.
- The diocese is under-represented in many areas within the diocese on the current interdenominational environment groups, and within wider community environmental groups.

- The diocese lags behind other dioceses in England and Wales as far as climate change and other environmental action and plans are concerned.
- Much good work and progress on environmental issues has taken place in parishes but is not celebrated or communicated widely.
- Many parishes are repeating research and scoping work, with consequent waste of valuable volunteer effort.
- Lack of central communication about environmental aims within the diocese has led to confusion about what the intentions and action plans are.
- Resources are being spent on reactive replying to concerns rather than proactive implementation of action plans.

Some of these findings are in direct contrast to Bishop Philip's stated aims for a Portsmouth Diocese wide approach to environmental aims and actions, outlined again in his November 7th pastoral letter.

This strategy paper seeks not only to define the direction of travel for the diocese over the next years but also to reconcile this divergence between current lack of interest in environmental concerns among possibly significant numbers of the clergy and some laity, and Bishop Philip's clearly expressed wishes for action.

I spoke (at Bourbank Hall conference on Living Laudato Si) about the ecological triad – love of God, love of Nature, love of Man – which should make Christians people of immense ecological passion and practical service.

Much current concern with climate change, however welcome, has a pragmatic thrust: the mess passed on to grandchildren, the loss of animal habitats, rising sea levels and population shift, the damage caused by extreme weather. Again, vested interests focus on the climate emergency but ignore the emergency of poverty and inequality, consumption and the throwaway culture.

For Christians, ecological concern is about more than pragmatism. It is about more than recycling or not littering the seabed with plastic. It's about more than fear, guilt or sentimentalism.

It is a comprehensive theological and anthropological vision. It is literally, in Christ and the Holy Spirit, about "saving" the planet. It is a responsible stewardship derived from the Gospel, from core Christian doctrine and values.

In this way, it elevates non-religious environmentalism to a higher viewpoint, whilst revising its terminology. Thus, sustainability for Christians is not just about resources: it is about a human ecology that requires a simpler lifestyle, with less consumerism and work for a new economic order, helpful to the poor.

To sum up, the Christian ecologist brings to the table a profound, theological understanding of nature, interrelated with a broad, comprehensive anthropology framed around three parameters: God, nature and an authentic humanism’.

Bishop Philip

Other diocesan progress

Over the past year the dioceses of Plymouth, Westminster and Birmingham have announced their carbon ambitions for 2030. Brentwood and Salford dioceses have both recently released guiding documents for their environmental efforts, and ‘The Journey to 2030,’ a project run by Catholic laity, has also launched a new website to help parish communities respond to the ecological crisis.

3. Environmental aims or Sustainable Development aims?

In our work to provide a diocesan contribution towards reversing the effects of climate change and in working to halt biodiversity loss and other environmental aims, we should not forget Pope Francis’s words:

We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.

Pope Francis

It may be that many of our stated aims within the action plans attached to this strategy should be expanded in practice to include sustainable development aims to ensure that we capture the essence of the single nature of the crisis.

Infographic of Sustainable Development Goals from the United Nations



This Portsmouth Diocese environment strategy paper seeks to clarify and formalise our aims and set out achievable targets with achievable dates, together with an agreed pathway to the targets.

4. Environmental Strategy: over-arching aims

A. To bring to the centre of diocesan, team, school, parish and parishioner life the concept of “care for our common home”:

as part of lived faith through liturgy and prayer
as part of actions within and outside the church

B. To live in solidarity with the poor:

by not taking unfair amounts of the world’s resources or by creating waste:
to “live simply”

C. To analyse the effect we have as a diocese, as teams, as parishes, as schools and as individuals on the rest of creation by using two basic criteria:

what we use and what we throw away

D. To advocate within the diocese and outside for an integrated approach to the related crises of social injustice and environment injustice.

To enable all in the diocese to speak up about these issues and about the Catholic response with confidence

E. To co-operate and develop joint working arrangements with external groups

to make best use of our own scarce resources
to promote the Catholic integral ecology

F. To promote the methodology of small individual incremental change, in addition to large scale institutional change:

both are essential to gain success in reducing our environmental impact and to helping the poor.

G. To bring environmental concerns to the centre of our decision making

To agree a clear intention to position environmental considerations, and measurement against an agreed environmental strategy, as an integral part of every decision taken within the decision-making structures of the diocese by 31 August 2022.

From that date, an environmental audit of every decision taken will be available to give clarity and transparency in the diocese's journey towards its other environmental aims.

5. Implementation

To enable this strategy document to be effective as a working part of diocese life, and to be understandable, the aims section has been further divided into a number of sections under the overarching general aims above.

- **Institutional:** which represent the decisions made by the diocese as a whole, relating to its corporate entity. This sector should lead the way forward.
- **Parish:** which represent the engine house of the diocese where real “on the ground” differences will be made. Full commitment to the strategy and the action plan will be needed here together with good leadership, in order to achieve the desired success... to preserve God's creation for future generations.
- **School:** another “engine house” and in addition the involvement of our young people is a critical factor in embedding environmental action and change in the diocese for the future.
- **Teams:** teams should and will provide the enabling “glue” to achieve success in all the sectors.
- **Parishioner:** to act on the teaching and guidance provided by parish priests and parish action and to disseminate those actions out into the wider community, enabling the parish to be a beacon of environmental good practice for all to see.
- **External:** as the diocese interacts with external organisations, to clearly and transparently demonstrate the moral imperative of an integral human ecology in all our connections.

These 6 main sections are then sub divided into hard aims and soft aims, with action plans and target dates to be developed for each.

Hard aims will include but not be limited to:

Carbon net zero target ... by 2030? measured by?
Energy consumption
Building materials
Transport policy
Financial assets
Water resources
Biodiversity

Food sources
Waste reduction and recycling

Soft aims will include but not be limited to:

Communication
Leadership
Teaching
Research
Behaviour

And the final 2 categories which run across the whole strategy are:

Clergy and Laity

again with action plans and targets to be developed for each.

There will inevitably be cross over between the sections and between hard and soft aims and between clergy and laity as work progresses.

This is not only to be expected but also encouraged as work done in one section and those achievements can inform and inspire in other areas of action in the diocese.

Effectively the environment strategy will be rolled out through a matrix with agreed action plans and targets for each of the sections/categories.

Dividing the strategy and the action plan in this way will give a clear, transparent, achievable and focused direction to implementation of environmental change within the diocese.

This is work that will need to be done after the adoption of the strategy and should take place in consultation with Teams, Schools and Parishes to produce an action plan by 31 August 2022.

6. Conclusion

Caritas, as environmental lead in the diocese, will play a pivotal role in the development of the agreed action plans which form the “doing” part of this strategy document, if approved.

We will welcome this role and welcome the opportunity to collaborate with all diocesan stakeholders as we move forward together to achieve Bishop Philip's vision.

"The task is to promote the conversion of individuals and families, faithful and clergy through the spirituality of an integral Catholic eco-theology."