

An Environmental Policy For Our Diocese

"From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a continuing source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine"

Pope Francis quoting the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

An invitation to our diocesan community to praise God for his gift of our beautiful planet and to share the Care for Our Common Home....

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...

...And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the morning were the sixth day

In 2015, Pope Francis issued the encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, *On Care for Our Common Home*. This document, above all, makes the connection between loving our planet and loving our neighbour. It challenges our "throwaway culture", engendered by the never-ending growth of our industrialised, capitalist economies, fuelled by what were believed to be unlimited resources. He calls upon our world community to value and take care of our precious planet and its limited resources. There is no doubting the importance Pope Francis places on this. In September 2016, Pope Francis said that prayer and action to protect the environment should be added to the seven-corporal works of mercy. He calls on us all to undertake an ecological conversion and change our lifestyle in the light of global warming and the damage it is causing especially to the most vulnerable people on the planet.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols said,

"The changing of attitudes and minds is the priority. Making the encyclical and its teaching known as broadly as possible is the key, both within and outside the Church"

The question for our diocesan community is how do we do that?

Pope Francis calls us to "a change in lifestyle" and a "change in mindset" in view of the damage global warming is causing to the earth and to the most vulnerable people on it. Change is always difficult and this challenge will undoubtedly touch on areas that may not be popular.

It is hoped that this document will suggest ways in which we, the diocesan community, both clergy and laity, can cooperate to take on the challenge of caring for our wonderful planet, preserving it for us and future generations. Let us go forward "in love and hope". Let us take the opportunity of reflecting, praying and taking action for social and environmental justice, while giving thanks for the beauty of God's creation.

What can we do as a diocesan community?

- We have in place an Ethical Investment Policy
- We are a Living Wage employer
- The Diocese of Birmingham, along with many other Catholic dioceses, purchases “green energy” in all its parishes
- Let us joyfully reflect on the beauty of God's creation and give thanks for God's gift of it to us through our prayers and Liturgy wherever possible
- Let us understand the biblical basis for taking care of creation – see Laudato Si’: Chapter 2.
- Let us raise awareness and educate ourselves about the damage done to God's creation, particularly damage that results in injustice and violence, both through the exploitative practices of large companies, and through extreme weather conditions.
- Let us help ourselves and others make the connections, as Pope Francis does, between careless use of plastic bottles or leaving lights on unnecessarily and the effects these have on the poorest and most vulnerable people in our world.
- Let us disinvest from fossil fuels.
- Let us take action as a diocese to be open to the plight of people affected by environmental damage and to engage with them.
- Let us work with those sharing similar concerns.
- Let us give particular support to CAFOD’s campaigns for safeguarding the environment and supporting refugees.
- Let us also encourage the growth of Live Simply parishes in the diocese as an appropriate response to Laudato Si’.

What can we do in our parishes and schools?

- How can we ensure that we have a collective lifestyle that respects others and God's creation?
- Schools are often to the fore in education on environmental matters. It could be helpful for parishes to learn from their expertise in this area.
- Start the process of becoming a Fair Trade parish and/or a Live Simply parish.
- Seek ways of making church gardens mini nature reserves. Grow vegetables for the church community.
- Adopt nearby gardens where possible.
- Encourage recycling and composting.
- Install bird boxes, beehives and bug hotels.
- Where there is no garden space, pots can be planted.
- Compost food and garden waste.
- Use environmentally-friendly cleaning products.
- Use washable china in our church halls.
- Avoid plastic and disposables use biodegradable products instead.
- Undertake an energy audit.
- Raise awareness of careful use of electricity.

- Explore the possibilities of installing solar panels on churches, church halls, presbyteries, convents, schools and all church buildings.
- Explore alternative heating methods such as geothermal sources.
- Explore the possibilities of providing charging points for electric vehicles on church car parks, powered by solar panels.
- Undertake an environmental audit of the use of paper and water to encourage economical use.
- Provide bicycle racks.
- Encourage the use of public transport when practicable and of car sharing.
- Collect and distribute food, clothing and other necessities for refugee projects and foodbanks.

What can we do individually: looking at our lifestyles?

- Encourage and support the diocesan and parish initiatives.
- Consider consuming less energy and fuel and explore purchasing energy from green providers. Install solar panels where possible.
- Take care in our use of water and paper at home. Avoid single-use plastic and look for alternatives in our life.
- Buy what we genuinely need, purchasing Fairtrade and organically, ethically sourced and locally produced items where possible.
- Dispose responsibly of what we don't need, avoiding dumping by giving away to charities or recycling organisations.
- Reduce our consumption of meat when possible, which will help to reduce methane gas and make more land available for grain crops.
- Use cars less, car share where possible, maximize the use of public transport and give careful consideration to whether we really need to fly.
- Establish and support alternatives to the “throwaway society”. Explore the activities of groups such as “Make Do and Mend” and other thrift fairs.
- Plant bee and butterfly friendly flowers and shrubs. Avoid wasting food. Prepare and cook only enough for you to consume.

“To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in love and hope”

Pope Francis quoting the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, 2000

Diocese of Birmingham Justice and Peace Commission

bham.jandp@gmail.com

birminghamjandp.org.uk

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