

Paris 2015, COP21; COP26; Laudato Si, and Action to combat Climate Change.

Five years ago this week, I was in Paris with a delegation of CAFOD campaigners from December 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>. I had been asked to join this group at the last minute as someone had been unable to go. I had spent some time during the previous months raising awareness of our campaign, "One Climate, One World" in parishes and schools across North Staffordshire, and so I was aware of the issues.



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was witnessing a truly historic moment for the World. However, I must not get ahead of myself.

Back to England. Earlier in the week I had met my fellow campaigners at St Pancras. I knew a few from Birmingham Diocese, five of us all told, and a couple of the CAFOD Staff. I did get to know the rest of the party during the next few days. We travelled to Paris on the Eurostar, about two and a half hours. We then went by metro to our accommodation, a hostel just north of the river. That first evening we attended an event organised by CIDSE, the Europe-wide group of Catholic Development Agencies. CIDSE, of which CAFOD is a member, had made all the arrangements for us whilst in Paris.

We spent the next couple of days attending events where we listened to speakers from around the world, witnessed some innovative ideas about living sustainably, a walking tour of some developments in Paris.

We are all familiar now with what happened in Paris. The talks were a success, in as much as an agreement was reached, although in many peoples' eyes it did not go far enough at all. This photograph is from Sky News. This is how they headlined their worldwide report on the Saturday. It shows CAFOD's campaign slogan with the Eiffel Tower in the background. One of my colleagues was holding the poster. It was taken on the Saturday afternoon at a huge demonstration near to the Eiffel Tower. Many thousands of campaigners had gathered, and we all joined hands in solidarity. We listened to speeches and then some music. I wandered around, marvelling at the fact that I



One of the most remarkable occurrences.

As we were walking in Paris Sister Chris met a Muslim gentleman. He was interested in her rosary and they had quite a conversation about his prayer beads and hers, although neither could speak each other's language. They stood there for quite some time.

In the evenings, we heard about progress in the talks. Neil Thorns, CAFOD Director of Advocacy, and Lorna Gold of Trocaire came to the large meeting venue we were using and kept us up to date with progress. As the week went on, these briefings were having a dampening effect on our spirits because certain of our hopes were not going to be realised, and there was every possibility that there would be no agreement. Food Security, Land Use, Human Rights and Climate Finance, needed for mitigation and adaptation, were all areas where there were difficulties.

The whole Conference was due to end on the Friday. However, the delegates agreed to continue through the night, and re-convene on the Saturday, in the hope that the final stumbling blocks to an agreement could be removed.

Meanwhile, we continued with our programme of meeting others, listening, and sharing about sustainable living; ecology and spirituality; and underpinning all of this was *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis' wonderful Encyclical Letter which had been published earlier that year with the intention of influencing the outcomes of the COP.

**[*Laudato Si*'** builds on previous church teaching. There are very many references to encyclicals and teaching documents. But Pope Francis provides a wonderful analysis of the current situation. He tells us that the problems of Climate Change and environmental degradation and the societal problems of extreme wealth and extreme poverty are in fact all one problem. "Everything is connected". He warns us "What sort of world are we leaving for our grandchildren, and future generations?" And he calls for an Integral Ecology, and for each of us to undergo an "ecological conversion".

This is especially important for us in the Developed World. We are the ones, however unwittingly and unknowingly, who have contributed most to what Francis calls "a pile of filth" because of our "throwaway culture". Please study *Laudato Si*'.]



## Memories

I want to share just a few vivid memories of my time in Paris. First was the time we met and listened to these ladies from central and southern Africa. They were from Malawi, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and South Africa. They told us how climate change was affecting their daily lives.

How each year they need to plant the seeds and wait for the rains. A good rainy season meant a good crop, that

is enough food for the next twelve months plus seed for planting next season. However, the rainy seasons were becoming more and more unreliable. Drought meant starvation, and the number of poor rainy seasons was increasing. They also told us how they were encouraged to buy and use chemicals, which harmed the land, and seeds which could not be used again, so they had to buy more.

My next memory is of the poets. The U.N. had sponsored a poetry competition about climate change. We watched a video of the winner, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, from the Marshall Islands . You can hear Kathy reciting her winning entry here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJuRjy9k7GA> It is powerful.



We also listened to two other young ladies recite their own entries. The first was Isabella Borgeson – she’s actually from the Philippines . Her poem was ‘Yolanda Winds’: listen to it here: [https://youtu.be/1z\\_8SN6p3cg](https://youtu.be/1z_8SN6p3cg)

The second was Terisa Siagatonu, (left); a Samoan-American, and her poem ‘Atlas’ is here:

<https://youtu.be/mZMgGzD1--g>

All three countries are under threat from rising sea levels and increasing frequency and power of cyclones. I recall one of the closing lines: “The sea used to feed us, but now the sea itself is hungry.”

One of our group, Judith Tooth, had previously participated in a 30-strong walking pilgrimage from London to Paris. They helped present our petitions, together with petitions from all over the world, (1 780 543 names), to Christiana Figueroa, the General Secretary of the COP. On the Thursday Judith, with three others, was chosen to present these petitions to President Hollande.



On Saturday 12th December, we did not have anything arranged for the morning. As the Conference was now continuing, we decided to make our way up to the Le Bouget Conference Area, quite a way to the North of Paris. The whole area was empty. We were the only campaigners there.

In front of the Centre there was a large area with white columns representing each country in the world. On each large column was the name of a country and its flag, which made for a very colourful display.

This photograph is of the five CAFOD delegates from Birmingham Diocese outside the Conference Centre in Paris. Left to right: Phil Mayland, Jane Lavery, Brendan Noonan, Jim Quinn and Kris Pears. We had a number of placards which had different quotes from Laudato Si, as well as our campaign slogan "One Climate, One World". As delegates were arriving for the final session, many of them waved in recognition and some even came over to us to thank us. They were all familiar with Pope Francis' Laudato Si'.



Once everyone had entered the building, and we were left there alone, we decided to make our way to find somewhere to eat some lunch. Before we left, we joined hands and prayed. We prayed that an agreement could be made, and we said the Lord's Prayer together.

We then left and found a restaurant which could accommodate all of us. As we were enjoying our lunch, we could see a large Television Screen and it was showing scenes from inside the Centre. Then came the moment when the Foreign Minister, who was Chairman of the Proceedings, could be seen with his gavel. Everyone was joining hands, smiling and crying, as he announced to the world that an agreement had been finalised. We, too, were laughing, crying, and cheering.



After our lunch we travelled to the Eiffel Tower for the final demonstration. The photograph shows our United banner,

and also the demonstration behind the Eiffel Tower at Les Invalides.



Our final day we attended Mass and then managed to find the station where we caught the Euro star back to London and on to our various homes.

**The Paris Agreement** as it has come to be known is remarkable. Before the end of 2016 it had been ratified. This meant that 55 countries accounting for over 55% of carbon emissions had ratified the agreement. I believe that this was the shortest time in history for a U.N. agreement to be ratified. To date 187 countries of 196 have ratified it.

The following is taken from the UM website : [UNFCCC](https://www.unfccc.org/). The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at COP 21 in Paris, on 12 December 2015 and entered into force on 4 November 2016.

**Its main goal is to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.**

To achieve this long-term temperature goal, countries aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible to achieve a climate neutral world by mid-century.

The Paris Agreement is a landmark in the multilateral climate change process because, for the first time, a binding agreement brings all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects.

How does the Paris Agreement work?



Implementation of the Paris Agreement requires **economic and social transformation**, based on the best available science. The Paris Agreement works on a **5- year cycle** of increasingly ambitious climate action carried out by countries. **By 2020**, countries submit their plans for climate action known as **nationally determined contributions (NDCs)**.

**NDCs** In their NDCs, countries communicate actions they will take to **reduce their Greenhouse Gas emissions** in order to reach the goals of the Paris Agreement. Countries also communicate in the NDCs actions they will take to **build resilience to adapt** to the impacts of rising temperatures.

**Long-Term Strategies** To better frame the efforts towards the long-term goal, the Paris Agreement invites countries to formulate and submit **by 2020 long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies (LT-LEDS)**. LT-LEDS provide the **long-term horizon to the NDCs**. Unlike NDCs, they are not mandatory. Nevertheless, they place the NDCs into the context of countries' long-term planning and development priorities, providing a vision and direction for future development.

**COP26 GLASGOW:** Because of the worldwide pandemic, COP26 has been postponed until next year. You can see from the above that this COP is 5 years on from PARIS. It is where countries have to report on their progress towards achieving their NDCs and then ratchet up their ambitions to achieve carbon neutrality sooner.

Parliament passed into law the ambition to become carbon neutral by 2050. This government recently announced the ambition to reduce emissions by 68% by the year 2030. This is laudable. However, we have to press the Government to publish real, workable plans on how to achieve these targets. In June the Climate Change Committee reported that we were very much behind achieving our interim targets, and so we must not be complacent.

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**What we are doing as a Church in the Birmingham Archdiocese.** In October 2016, those of us who travelled to Paris prepared and delivered a report to the Diocesan Justice and Peace Assembly.

We called for all parishes to sign up for the Live Simply Parish Award. This Award asks parishes to demonstrate how they are living Simply, In Solidarity with the poorest and Sustainably with Creation. Why wouldn't you want to do this? Archbishop Bernard listened attentively to our presentation. He later wrote in his Advent Pastoral Letter of 2017:

“We view the world in a new way through the light of Christ and we learn to have a deeper appreciation for the gift of creation. Two years ago, Pope Francis emphasised this in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* when he said: ‘What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?’ The Holy Father urges us never to forget the intimate relationship between the fragility of the planet and the plight of the poor, echoing the compassion of the Messiah: He has sent me to bring good news to the poor. They are the ones who suffer most from the way our earth has been mistreated and exploited. Pope Francis also says that **we need to listen both to the cries of creation and to the cries of the poor**. When we do so we undergo what he calls an ecological conversion. The Holy Father encourages us **to live more simply, more sustainably and more in solidarity with the poor**. He invites us to make our choices based on a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters – including future generations. Pope Francis has made it clear that he sees care for all creation as a work of mercy. He says: ‘As a spiritual work of mercy, care for our common home calls for a grateful contemplation of God’s world, which allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us. As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness and makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world.’ In *Laudato Si'* we have an authoritative and comprehensive presentation of the Catholic Church’s social teaching.

I would ask you, if you have not already done so, to look carefully at Pope Francis’ encyclical. Perhaps it could be the basis for a study group in your parish during next Lent. **Encouraged by *Laudato Si'* you may wish to consider becoming a LiveSimply parish next year, using the scheme prepared by CAFOD.**

**The present:** We are at a most important time in our history. The Covid19 pandemic has given us an opportunity to really take stock. We do have the chance, now, to build back better. To seize the opportunity of a green recovery. To really take the opportunities that renewable energies can give us, and the job opportunities that are implicit. We must not go back to the old ways, where the gap between rich and poor gets wider and wider and inequalities abound, not only between rich and poor countries, but between rich and poor within our own countries in the United Kingdom.

We (Church Leaders; teachers; administrators; and every individual) must lead by speaking out at every opportunity and in every workplace, school, parish and home. Every church and church building should be checked for its energy efficiency and brought up to a standard where we are not damaging Creation. New buildings should be designed to the highest possible standards using the best materials.

The postponement of COP26 until next year is an opportunity for us all to educate ourselves and hold our Government to account. We, the U.K., have the Chairmanship of the COP. We

have a once in a lifetime chance to get this right, by showing leadership, by example and by diplomacy, to bring those lagging behind along with us.

**Climate Ambition Summit 2020** The work of the COP has already begun. Starting tomorrow, 12<sup>th</sup> December, is the Climate Ambition Virtual Summit. At the Climate Ambition Summit 2020, countries will set out new and ambitious commitments under the three pillars of the Paris Agreement: mitigation, adaptation, and finance commitments. There will be no space for general statements. We need to look carefully at the various promises and commitments.

**The Current Situation:** The Climate Transparency Report, which examines in detail, the progress of the G20 countries towards reducing carbon emissions (the G20 are responsible for over 80% of emissions and also control close to 85% of the world's GDP) shows that during 2020 emissions have been reduced by 7.5%. This is largely due to the collapse of aviation. The majority of G20 countries are still investing more in fossil fuels than in renewables. I recommend that you read this report.

**Pathways for Action:** First of all pray. We should pray as individuals at home. Pray together in our communities.

Then we need to look at our own circumstances, an examination of conscience, and see where we can make changes in our own lifestyles.

Then repeat the examination of conscience in our parish communities. Could we inform ourselves better about the Church's Social Teaching? Could we get together to study *Laudato Si'*? Can we get together and see how we can become a Live Simply Parish? You will find that you are already doing some things which qualify for the Award. You will discover new ways of responding to Pope Francis' call for an ecological conversion.

**Conclusion:** This article is a result of my own experiences. It is not a complete analysis of what is happening in the world, in our own country, in our own parishes. It is my hope that if you have read this far then you will consider taking some further actions to modify your lifestyle, and that you will try to influence others.

Please do not allow the enormity of the situation to overwhelm you. I have done that in the past. Thinking that 'I cannot make a difference so I won't try'. Talk or write to others. Write to your M.P. He/She is your friend, your representative, your link to Government Ministers.

I will finish with part of the Romero prayer.

Thank you for reading this far. If you want to contact me please do so via the Birmingham Diocese Justice and Peace Commission.

**This is what we are about.**

**We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.**

**We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.**

**We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.**

**We are prophets of a future not our own.**

Phil Mayland

December 11<sup>th</sup> 2020.