

Action Plan on Climate Change. Address to General Synod by Dr Donald Bruce

“The Apostle Paul to the Christians in Rome : “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth up to the present time.” (Romans 8:22). That has never been more true than now.

“Human activity is changing the global climate catastrophically. This week, scientific measurements of levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere found they are now 50% more than levels before the industrial revolution, levels the earth’s atmosphere last experienced over four million years ago. And we have caused it, by burning fossil fuels: gas, oil and coal. The ‘greenhouse effect’ which this and other emissions has caused is inexorably warming the whole planet in ways that are harming lives, communities, health, food, and God’s creation itself.

“In Scotland it is causing more storms, flooding, wind damage, landslides, crop pests migrating northwards; but for many in Africa it threatens where people’s next meal is coming from as as desertification and drought take hold; in the Pacific, it’s the opposite problem. Whole islands are becoming uninhabitable as sea levels rise. The impacts are many and various, but there is a common feature, they fall disproportionately on the world’s poor and disadvantaged, including some in our own communities, and it is these who also have the least means to adapt.

“And we are all part of the cause. It is our homes, cars, work and lifestyles, and our churches are all contributing. We and our forefathers have been living off a legacy of cheap fossil fuels without taking heed of the waste (carbon dioxide) that has been accumulating over generations, or paying for it. God’s creation, our planet is now presenting us with the bill, the arrears of these wastes, all in a

lump. We have to face the reality that we all will have to spend more of our budget on our energy in our lives and our churches because we have been paying too little in the past.

“The past we cannot change. The future we can. That is why the world’s governments signed the historic 2015 UN Paris agreement, and will come to Glasgow this November to take forward the urgent process of reducing emissions to a level that would be tolerable rather than catastrophic. Scientists warn that what we do in the next five to ten years will determine the state of the planet we bequeath to our children’s children. The next generations are depending on what we do *now*.

“What needs to change? Simply put, we must move away from burning fossil fuels as the way we provide heating, transport and industrial processes. Yet these are embedded in the lifestyle of industrialised countries, in every major economic sector, and in all of our lives. The changes we need to make encompass most aspects of our life as a church, not only our buildings, but in every area where we burn coal, oil or gas.

“We need to look to move to replace these by electricity, and other renewable alternatives as far as we possibly can, and where this is not reasonably practicable, to reduce, save and offset. Scotland has one of the lowest carbon footprints for its electricity in the world, so use electricity rather than gas as often as you can. Even in cooking use the microwave more and the gas hob less!

“We do not underestimate the challenge! But we wish to encourage not just that must this be done, but it *can* be done. We and the Churches of England, in

Wales, of Scotland are making commitments towards reducing our emissions to net zero by 2030.

“That is why we are bringing a set of resources and practical recommendations to churches, clergy, staff, congregations, dioceses and you, the individual members of our churches. Our aim is to ‘resize’ what might seem like a daunting task into steps which we can already do and then build upon progressively and realistically.

“So we set out in this paper

- 10 points of guidance on p.86 – a summary of the areas we need to address
- Then we apply this to the whole church at every level, congregations, dioceses, at provincial level, and we indicate some of the steps to be taken by each sector of the church on p.87
- Although our net zero target is for church activities, it would be senseless not to ask us all as individuals to apply the principles to our lives and households,
- On pages 88 to 89 we address what for most churches is the biggest part of our carbon footprint – the buildings – which often the hardest to tackle. We try to break it down into steps you can take progressively, one of which is doing your own energy footprint and an audit of what actions you can take
- Finally we point you to useful resources to help. SEC is relatively small but we unhesitatingly urge you to draw on others’ expertise, just as we have in drawing up this Programme of Actions

“We are not alone in this task. There is now a movement across the churches across the whole UK, and there is now some excellent experience to draw on, like Eco-Congregation Scotland and its English counterpart Eco-Church, and the Church of England’s and Church of Scotland’s expert advice on what to do in church buildings (state of the art advice, rooted in the real world situation of churches). There are good secular sources like Home Energy Scotland, Zero Waste Scotland, the Energy Saving Trust, Historic Environment Scotland. You may find grants out there to help.

“We are looking for champions people who have ‘got it’, a person or a small group who can take this forward and work together and learn together, often with other churches or others in the community.

“This paper is a summary, a taster if you like. We are working hard to supplement this with a Toolkit providing a more detailed set of resources, which we aim to have available on-line and in hard copy later this Summer 2021, containing practical recommendations to us all.

“And in doing so, we recognise that the sheer diversity of situations across the Province - churches, clergy, staff, congregations, dioceses and individuals. None of them are the same. This Toolkit cannot be a ‘one size fits all’ it is a set of actions and resources for you to work out what is most relevant to you. What I would like to see, if it’s feasible, is an interactive website where you can click on the parts that are relevant to your situation, find advice you need to plan what to do where you are, and the links to external resources to help.

“We read in this morning’s worship, “*Today*, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” It is now a race against time. The transition to net zero carbon emissions requires action from us all. As a 2017 Synod report put it,

“On no conceivable ethical grounds can we simply continue ‘business as usual’.”

“Secular environmentalists can get very gloomy. But we have a Saviour. We are people of the resurrection who have begun to know the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. We urge you to join in this task of caring for Christ’s creation, as people who share Paul’s ‘hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God’. Brothers and sisters in that redeemed family will you join in and play your part in that liberation today and in the coming months?”

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