



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

The Archbishop writes in today's [Yorkshire Post](#) about efforts to address the climate emergency ahead of the COP26 summit. The article follows in full...

When the weather is fine, I often say my morning prayers sitting by the River Ouse that borders Bishopthorpe Palace where I live. There are several small plaques on the wall marking where the river rose during some of the devastating floods of the last few hundred years.

I've lived here less than a year, but already the river has flooded twice and on both occasions the water level was higher than the marks on the wall a century ago. But, we no longer put up plaques. What was a 'once every century or so' occurrence is now commonplace.

Like frogs in a hot pot, we have allowed ourselves to be dangerously content about the changing climate.

Anyone who watched the devastation caused by flooding at Fishlake, and more recently in northern Europe and China, knows that we cannot ignore the inevitable damage caused by rising water levels. Angela Merkel had no words to describe the devastation she saw at Schuld. For many across Western Europe, this was the first time that deaths had been attributed to climate change. From prolonged droughts, devastating tropical storms, heatwaves and wildfires, these all have catastrophic effects on human life. But the headline impacts of climate change and the associated change in weather can no longer be a far-flung threat. There are only so many barriers we can build or sandbags we can put down. And crucially, as flat dwellers can attest, a waterlogged basement can bring the whole building down.

The 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) to be held in Glasgow in November, cannot afford to fail. It is the most significant meeting since Paris. The Paris Agreement's long-term temperature goal is to keep the rise in mean global temperature to well below 2 °C (3.6 °F) above pre-industrial levels, and preferably limit the increase to 1.5 °C (2.7 °F). This remains a landmark agreement in the multi-lateral climate change process because for the first time we have a binding agreement to work to continually undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and crucially adapt to its effects.

How can we inhabit the world in a way that is mindful, sustainable, healthy, life giving for everyone? This is the biggest question facing the human race. Where once we talked about sustainability, we now question whether the fundamentals of our present existence on this planet are sustainable at all. We now talk about climate emergency not just climate change. And it is the poorest and most vulnerable who suffer most, exacerbating inequalities further on health, food, water, housing and livelihoods.

A successful COP must then be a success for the poor. It must pierce the insulation of wealth that prevents us from seeing the harm we are doing, to ourselves as well as others.

The Church is echoing and amplifying the demands of the poorest nations where the impacts of climate change are most devastating. It is our moral duty to do this. Moreover, what may first become apparent amongst the most vulnerable will, in time, impact everyone – like the water

levels outside my house. These demands include delivering on the promise of “ratcheting up” efforts to reduce and mitigate climate change; an end to public money going to subsidise fossil fuels; and a new source of finance (of at least \$100bn a year) for climate-related loss-and-damage.

Our leaders carry huge responsibility. The eyes of the world, especially the poor, are upon them. Will they deliver this?

The COP26 Faiths Task Group is calling for a global green and just recovery from the pandemic. The Anglican Consultative Council will be sending a delegation to COP in a bid to ensure they will be listening to those for whom climate change is a matter of life and death right now. Top of their list of priorities will be to ensure that decision-makers hear first-hand from young people and indigenous people about their experience and ideas.

Fighting climate change must be the UK government's first priority. We can be a world leader in clean wind energy, accelerating progress towards net zero emissions. Number 10 has announced investment in green spaces as part of plans to restore species and build greater biodiversity. But there is more to do. Across Yorkshire and the Humber, a climate commission has been established to bring together the public and private sectors to support and guide ambitious climate actions across the region.

The Church is also attempting to lead by example. Safeguarding the planet is a “mark of mission”. We are committed to reaching net zero carbon by 2030. Despite the unprecedented challenges of Covid-19, parishes, dioceses and cathedrals have recognised the urgency and completed the energy footprint tool, participating in a consultation on the scope of net-zero.

The financial bodies which safeguard the Church’s money are investing their assets to secure a “just transition” from carbon-dependence to a net-zero carbon future. This includes £765m invested in carbon-busting schemes. Whether that’s electric car charging points or investing in companies trying to bring low carbon solutions in energy production and energy efficiency to the market.

I’m also incredibly proud and challenged by the example of young people, especially ones I have heard from [here in Yorkshire](#). Young Christians from across the country are making their way to Scotland bringing their messages on climate change to the whole world. I will be greeting these modern-day pilgrims in September as they pass through York.

All this can seem overwhelming. It’s tempting to see it as someone else’s problem. We would love it just to go away. But it won’t. The water levels are rising. The time to act is now. This affects each one of us. We are going to have to make individual changes as well as national and global changes. We are probably going to have to learn to live with less and be satisfied with enough. Our insatiable desire for everything may leave us with nothing.

So as I sit by the river this weekend, and celebrate Yorkshire Day tomorrow, I will be praying that in this most beautiful county we will play our part in making COP 26 count. Together we are stewards of this most precious gift – the earth itself, and each other’s well-being as part of one

humanity inhabiting one world.

Source URL: <https://www.archbishopofyork.org/news/latest-news/climate-emergency-not-just-climate-change>