



THE ARCHBISHOP  
OF YORK

Archbishop Stephen writes in the [Church Times](#) as nations prepare to gather for COP26. His article follows in full:

In 2009 the UK Environment Agency asked 25 secular environmental leaders what might 'save the planet'. Second on the list of 50 items, behind only greater energy efficiency, was for world faiths to become engaged on the issue of environmental protection.

As nations prepare to gather for COP26, the most important climate summit since the signing of the Paris Agreement and the biggest diplomatic event to take place on British soil since World War 2, I'm pleased to see the global church taking a more active role in creation care.

In 2015 there was Pope Francis' papal encyclical *Laudato Si* and the Lambeth Declaration on climate change, not to mention only last month we saw for the first time the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Anglican Communion jointly warning of the urgency of environmental sustainability and its impact on the poor.

That impact was something I witnessed myself three years ago when travelling in a part of Northern Kenya where it hadn't rained for 18 months. Seeing children waving empty plastic bottles at us, begging for water was one of the saddest things I have experienced. Every day the equivalent of 12 jumbo jets worth of people die because they do not have access to fresh water. This horror is only going to worsen without tackling the injustice of the climate crisis.

For me the challenge of the environmental emergency is captured in the Lord's Prayer. We pray "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven." If you look in the Book of Common Prayer you'll notice it says "in earth, as it is in heaven." Somewhere in the last hundred years or so "in earth as it is in heaven" has somehow changed to, "on earth as it is in heaven". It was not an organized change by some church commission, it just happened.

We used to believe, and to know, that we lived in earth, that we were part of it, interdependent with it. And if we had a relationship with the earth it was to be its good stewards, living in it, and with it, and serving it. Then somewhere in the last couple of hundred years we moved to a position from living in the earth to living on the earth. And now I'm separate from the earth. The earth is mine, and I can do with it what I will. And from that, disaster upon disaster has flowed. We've been blind to the consequences of our actions, and we now live in a time where we must take

action.

The prayer also suggests a solution to our broken relationship with creation. It continues, “Give us today our daily bread.” Give me enough for today, save me from wanting more than my share. So no, I don't want strawberries on Christmas Day flown in from the other side of the world. I need to live differently, I need to inhabit the planet in a different, more sustainable way.

It's right that we advocate and campaign for better legislation for the environment, that we look for progress at meetings like COP26. We have political power to use our voice for these things. But we also need a change of heart, where we recognise that we live in the earth, where we start to learn to know what enough looks like.

I welcome the interventions from church leaders and the words of the Lambeth Declaration. But we must also remember that the church manifesting a more sustainable relationship with creation is happening in individual churches and homes across the country. There is Arocha's Eco Church scheme which has seen thousands of churches being awarded gold, silver and bronze awards for taking steps to ensure their church acts as better stewards of creation.

The Church of England has made the commitment to be net carbon zero by 2030 – in just nine years time. I am proud of this bold decision, which is aligned with the most ambitious and forward-thinking institutions and ahead of the vast majority of others. If we want to speak prophetically into this debate it's important that we act prophetically too.

It's going to be a big challenge but there is a huge amount happening. Churches are switching to renewable electricity providers, we're reducing our energy waste, fitting solar panels and ground source heaters. It may be a cliché but yes, there's a role for changing to LED light bulbs too.

Some of our buildings already have a very small carbon footprint, others are bigger. It's a huge, ambitious and pretty terrifying programme. And I don't know whether we'll get there by 2030. But if we get a long way towards it, it will be a significant achievement. The first step for anyone wanting to help join us is to do a simple audit of your church's energy using a CofE app: [churchofengland.org/energy-footprinting-tool](https://churchofengland.org/energy-footprinting-tool)

Over the next few weeks we will be watching and praying in hope for a positive outcome at COP26 which will see the world take a major step forward in bringing climate justice to those in need of it. But whatever the outcome in Glasgow, there will be a need for a movement of people with changed hearts that live in the earth and not just on it, that cherishes the gift of 'enough' and that tries to model a way of living which works

in harmony with God’s creation, not against it.

**Source URL:** <https://www.archbishopofyork.org/news/latest-news/watching-and-praying-hope-positive-outcome-cop26>