

Ecumenical World Development Conference – Hope in a Changing Climate

① RL – next Vice President of the Methodist Church, elected role – leadership and encouragement.

② Day job – JPIT – ecumenical collaboration by Methodist Church, Baptist union, URC and Church of Scotland. Enable our churches to speak out on issues of justice and peace, and to influence those in power, and energise and affirm local congregations. Range of issues poverty, migration, religious freedom, peace and of course climate change

Come at this both as church leader with desire to see my church respond faithfully, creatively and wholeheartedly to God's mission for our church
And with particular responsibility for social justice issues in my church and three others

So what do I see that it means to be church in a changing climate, where is the hope and where are the challenges? Being a Methodist, things come in threes...

③ **We are firstly a worshipping community**

Our God is an incarnational God who meets us in the person of Christ. The Methodist Church's statement on climate change - *Hope in God's Future: Christian discipleship in the context of climate change* - emphasises the place of the material of God's creation and its importance to the Creator and to human kind.

Creation is not given to us for our use but trusted to us for our care. As a worshipping community our response to the natural world is one of awe and thanksgiving.

We exercise responsibility in partnership with God. We acknowledge that God remains present in his creation and in the transformation of our world through transformation of people. In this we find a source of hope.

Sign of hope – pray and fast for the climate (Nov15 – Dec16): different church leaders or experts wrote reflection for a day of prayer and fasting on the first day of each month.

As local worshipping communities physical embodiment in church buildings – at least 70 Methodist Churches have installed solar power. Encouraged energy saving as a way to tackle climate change.

Churches sought accreditation under Eco Church or Eco Congregations in Scotland. Not enough yet, but some great stories (eg Nexus Methodist Church in Bath – for them a commitment to being an eco-church has meant

- Services, children's work and housegroups on the environment,
- practical change such as identifying ways to minimise energy use and the serious promotion of recycling,
- and outward facing activities such as engagement with Transition Bath and Christian Aid campaigns as well as promoting community discussion groups.

We are also keen to explore the concept of Eco-Circuits and Eco-Districts alongside Eco-Dioceses and Eco-Cathedrals.

So as local worshipping communities I see signs of hope. Ways in which churches are making real their understanding of our role in creation.

④ Global community

The global church maybe the largest civil society network on earth. Consequently when considering climate change we listen carefully to the voices of others.

We hear echoes of the Old Testament prophets in the call of the Pacific Council of Churches who in 2007 issued an urgent call to our world with particular reference to developed nations such as our own.

We recognise that nations are left wounded by our negligence in the past. Their injuries we continue to worsen through our irresponsibility in the present. In *Hope in God's Future* we have said that: -

Closing our ears to the call from the Pacific Council of Churches and to others like it would be nothing less than giving up our claim to be Christ's disciples."

Recently visited PK as a guest of the Church of Pakistan. In my ignorance, I'd never thought about the impact of climate change on the country – other issues of global politics dominate.

But PK is one of countries most vulnerable to climate change, and has limited resources to adapt. Melting of glaciers – obviously long term threat in terms of water flow and flooding. But what people talked to me about was the noticeable changes in weather patterns, and consequently both devastating flooding and the water stress.

The link between extreme poverty and climate change came home to me when I visited the brick kilns, one of most shocking experiences of my life.

Whole families, mostly Christians, living in dreadful conditions, and working as bonded labourers, tied to employers by debt and advance wages. Live and work around monstrous kilns, handmaking bricks – along with the piles of bricks were the piles of coal to fire the kilns. People doing backbreaking labour, breathing in toxic fumes from the coal-fired kilns, kilns pumping out plumes of black smoke.

Brought back to me the message from the Pope's encyclical concerning the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. It is the poorest in our world who suffer most directly and most severely from the mistreatment of our planet.

Yet...signs of hope there too. COP, a tiny minority community, tries to respond to disaster relief and provide support and health care, but limited. But immensely inspired by conversation with members of the COP who were trying to get not only priests to talk about climate change in their sermons, but also working with imams to encourage groups of Christians and Muslims to work on issues of water stress as a way of building relationships between faiths. Tackling climate change not only had a place within religious communities, but between them, part of the desperately needed and fragile interfaith relations in the country.

PK is just one country, very much on my heart at the moment; people in this room will have so many other stories and personal experiences where we can learn from the global church. Important as part of the global church not to forget these words: *Closing our ears to the call of the wider world would be nothing less than giving up our claim to be Christ's disciples*

⑤ Transformational community

As Christians we believe in transformation and redemption. What does this involve? One of the distinctive aspects of the Methodist report, *Hope in God's Future*, is its recognition of structural sin in relation to climate change.

Ernst Conradie, a South African theologian argued that the situation his country was an analogy to the response to climate change. Most South Africans had no direct responsibility for apartheid, but were guilty in benefiting from it and failing to challenge its injustice.

Similarly we didn't personally call into being the industrialised economies which have resulted in climate change, but we are now guilty of enjoying the fruits of systems that threaten the future of God's creatures.

And we fail to confess our guilt and change our lives because we are not sure that we can envisage, or want to live, the renewed and reordered lives that would result from being forgiven.

Like the rich man who could not bear Jesus' command to be separated from his possessions and sadly turned away, we look at the prospect of lives within levels of greenhouse gas emissions that the earth can sustain, and decide we prefer our lives of sin.

If we are to find hope in the face of climate change we need to be a transformative church. Transformation of our own lives in Christ and therefore of how we choose to live, and also a transformation of our world as we repent the structural sin of climate change.

So how do we approach these deeper transformational questions? MCB committed to advocacy and campaigning and very grateful for the lead and resources provided by Christian Aid and others. Made hopeful by the fact that so many Methodists were part of the 50,000 on the street for the climate march last November and joined the earlier climate lobby of parliament.

In terms of our advocacy this has largely focused on our own government's need to put our house in order with a credible plan for a sustained transition from the use of fossil fuels.

We need clear commitment and delivery on renewable targets, something which appears to be undermined by recent cuts to incentives for investment in green energy, and alongside Christian Aid and others will be focusing on the fifth carbon budget in the coming months.

We also need to take seriously where we put our money. The Methodist Church recognises that we are called to stand apart from forces that lead to destruction of our planet and certainly not to profit from them.

And so the Church has taken the decision that, through its ethical investment body, it will engage with companies to encourage them to disclose their emissions and recognise the need dramatically to reduce those emissions and leave a substantial proportion of fossil fuel reserves will need to remain unexploited.

After careful consideration and some engagement we have disinvested from Glencore, Tullow Oil, Premier Oil and the utilities provider RWE.

We have placed a total of nine companies on our ethical exclusion list because the proportion of revenues derived from the extraction of thermal coal and tar sands is incompatible with Methodist position on climate change, and we are actively engaging with others.

As a transformational community we are seeking to repent and turn away from our lives of sin.

- ⑥ Now I'm aware I've described is an ideal situation. The vision and understanding of the Church as a worshipping, global and transformative community leads us to great hope, and there are examples of hope. But there are also many obstacles which mean that not every Methodist has embraced care for creation as an integral part of our discipleship.

Whilst some people will think it outside the core concerns of the Church and don't see care for creation as part of God's mission for God's church, in my experience most people recognise it has a place.

But our people are overloaded. Churches are largely run by volunteers, many of whom are elderly. The pressure to keep the building upright, the preaching plan filled, the collection coming in – in the face of in most places declining numbers - is too great.

Doesn't allow for focus on something that is seen as "additional". When resources – financial and human – are limited, it is hard to contemplate major changes to the management of our buildings.

And the problem behind that is that we probably don't fully appreciate the urgency, novelty and seriousness of the situation we are facing. We don't fully appreciate the scale of the task ahead, and when we glimpse it, yet again we feel overwhelmed and overloaded.

- ⑦ How do we break this cycle? Tackling that has to be a question of prayer, doing the theology and ethics together, communicating the stories and engaging with debate.

So we can all see signs of hope around us. Signs that Christian disciples – along with many others – are taking seriously the challenge that we face. The obstacles are real and significant. But thank you for what you are all doing to take on this holy challenge.

- ⑧ end.