



OUR PROPHETIC JOURNEY TOWARDS CLIMATE JUSTICE

**PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL
AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
FROM BLACK CHURCH LEADERS.**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Christian Aid would like to thank many of those without whom this resource would not be possible. We would like to give special thanks to all of those who led and supported the development of this resource, who welcomed this work so warmly. Key contributors include:

- **RADHIKA BYNON**
Author
- **SARAH-JANE NII-ADJEI**
Climate Justice Church Programme Manager
- **THE VENERABLE DR ROSEMARIE MALLET**
Archdeacon of Croydon, Southwark Diocese
- **GIDEON COMMEY**
Eco Theologian and Founder of Ghana Youth Environmental Movement
- **REVD ISRAEL OLOFINJANA**
Director at One People Commission, Evangelical Alliance
- **REVD ALTON BELL**
Senior Pastor, Wembley Family Church
- **DR ROBERT BECKFORD**
Theologian at The Queen's Foundation Centre for Black Theology
- **MELANIE NAZARETH**
Climate Activist at Christian Climate Action
- **FAN SISSOKO**
Graphic designer
- **LOUISE FOREMAN**
Design Co-ordinator



ABOUT CHRISTIAN AID

Christian Aid exists to create a world where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty. We are a global movement of people, churches and local organisations who passionately champion dignity, equality, justice and love worldwide. We are the changemakers, the peacemakers, the mighty of hearts.

INTRODUCTION

CLIMATE CHANGE, ALTHOUGH SOMETHING WHICH WILL AFFECT US ALL, IS A DEEPLY RACIALISED PHENOMENON. AS HIGHLIGHTED IN CHRISTIAN AID'S LANDMARK 'BLACK LIVES MATTER EVERYWHERE' REPORT, BLACK AND BROWN PEOPLE IN THE POOREST COUNTRIES FACE THE BRUNT OF THE IMPACTS.

Faith plays a crucial role in influencing both personal identity and world-view for many, shaping the values that underpin people's choices and priorities. Among Black communities in the UK, the importance of Christianity is demonstrated by the continued growth in Black majority churches, in direct contrast to trends in the general population.

As part of its work on climate justice, Christian Aid brought together a group of Black church leaders and Christian climate activists of colour, to increase the visibility of their perspectives on environmental issues. This storybook captures the personal journeys of some of those leaders and provides powerful insights into the distinctive contribution of Black and other diverse voices on climate justice. At present, many climate groups in the UK struggle to engage people from diverse communities. The stories gathered here suggest a need for a fundamental reframing of the way climate issues are communicated, shifting the focus away from ecology and lifestyle, to a discussion centred on the values of social justice and equality.

These distinct stories share a common thread: they call for a fundamental reframing of the climate debate, placing the fight for our planet firmly within the global movement for social justice and equality. Climate justice is a necessary path to realise the hope of heaven on earth.



REVD ROSEMARIE MALLETT ARCHDEACON OF CROYDON, THE DIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK

My awareness of climate was sparked through studying, living and working in Senegal, Tanzania and Ethiopia early in my career, seeing first-hand the ways that the interests of corporations and global capitalism have exacerbated environmental damage and climate change, and undermined and threatened the livelihoods and lives of local people.

In Senegal, tomatoes were abundant, the staple of every market and every meal, and then, because of a development deal, cheap Spanish tomatoes were brought in and were part of a process that caused deep damage to local livelihoods and the national economy. The same issue was obvious in Tanzania, where the cashew nut industry was hindered by the tied aid deals made to the deficit of local farmers. In Ethiopia I witnessed the deforestation as trees were being cut down for charcoal.

I come from a small, quite flat island in the Caribbean, reliant on tourism for economic development, and vulnerable not only to sea level changes but to differences in changes to fossil fuel driven travel. The impact of climate change is not being borne equally or fairly between wealthy and poorer nations, and any focus on environmental change must also focus on climate justice.

God's creation and created order is suffering, because of wilful neglect and over exploitation. My faith is lived through my activism to fight for justice and equity in the care and stewardship of creation. Even as Christians pray for the heavenly paradise, we are called to bring that kingdom into being in the here and now. We are called to build God's kingdom, to care for creation, and to work to transform any unjust and exploitative structures that harm the earth and its people.

USE OUR CHURCH ENGAGEMENT TOOL TO DRAW FROM RELEVANT SCRIPTURE AND INSPIRE POSITIVE ACTION ON CLIMATE JUSTICE.

Visit www.christian-aid.org/getinvolved/campaigns to find out more.



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GIDEON COMMEY **ECO THEOLOGIAN AND FOUNDER OF GHANA** **YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT**

My first awareness of environment was as a young volunteer, engaging communities in Ghana about the link between sanitation, waste management and malaria. I witnessed the impact of coastal erosion in Keta, a community in the Volta region of Ghana, where homes and buildings had been swept away, and this was linked to climate change. I became aware of the dynamic youth climate movements in the UK and Australia, and was spurred to set up the Ghana Youth Environmental Movement. We were a handful of passionate, inexperienced young people, keen to raise awareness and engage policy makers about sanitation and climate change. We created social media campaigns, conducted street interviews and captured stories, raising funds from family and friends.

As a Christian, I struggled to understand how Ghana with its strong religious heritage could show such little respect for the environment. The Bible speaks profoundly about creation and the critical role of relationship - between one person and another, and with the environment - and yet here was such disregard for conservation, with rampant deforestation and terrible waste management.

I got the opportunity to study African theology and environment and came to understand that conservation and environmental consciousness were deeply embedded in our traditional way of life. The interaction of the missionary movement with these practices meant people were taught to jettison the myths and ancient behaviours that supported conservation, and so fractured the fundamental connection between survival and respect for creation - leaving land fallow, avoiding over-fishing, not eating certain animals and so on. In addition, Christianity was presented as a purely spiritual endeavour concerned with saving souls rather than a life centred on relationship with other people and the environment.

In the same way that Paul's letter to the Hebrews teaches that God revealed himself to the Jews through time, so God also spoke to our African forefathers, and pointed to eternal truths through our culture. God is always active and Christ reveals himself through what is already in existence in the culture. We need to engage church leaders on the Biblical basis of creation, which is very much in tune with traditional African beliefs steeped in environmental consciousness.

**IF YOU ARE AGED BETWEEN 18 AND 30, YOU CAN
JOIN CHRISTIAN AID'S YOUTH PROPHETIC ACTIVIST
SCHEME TO BECOME A GREEN AGENT FOR CHANGE.**

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REVD ISRAEL OLOFINJANA
DIRECTOR OF ONE PEOPLE
COMMISSION- EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

The seeds of my awareness of environmental issues were sown in my childhood in Nigeria, where I witnessed flooding and its impact in our community, and a childhood love of wildlife documentaries. When I became a Christian, I was deeply aware of the instability in the country, of life being tough for many people, and I became passionate about evangelism, discipleship, church-planting. My perspective shifted through studying African theology and African church history, which goes way back, far beyond the European influences of 17th and 18th centuries, and my understanding of mission started to broaden out beyond a focus on evangelism to include a social dimension. I started to hear about climate change, and it reminded me of those early musings about flooding in Nigeria.

In an African context, becoming a Christian is sometimes about leaving the traditional practices of worshipping the water goddess, worshipping the earth, and I was initially sceptical about the environmental movement and a potential link to 'nature religion'. But studying African theology taught me about the relationship between God, kinship, land, forest and sea - and the more I looked into scripture, the more I understood that God cares deeply about his creation and calls us to the same. My perception shifted and I see that God's mission has a social and environmental aspect.

My connection to this issue is deeply rooted in Scripture. In Romans, Paul suggests that creation itself is groaning and needs redemption. God is saving not only souls but every dimension of his creation.

**“WHEN TWO OR MORE PEOPLE ARE
GATHERED IN MY NAME, I AM IN THE
MIDST OF THEM” – MATTHEW 18:10.
JOIN CHRISTIAN AID IN A PRAYER CHAIN
FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE.**

Visit caid.org.uk/prayer-chain to sign up



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DR ROBERT BECKFORD
THEOLOGIAN AT THE QUEEN'S
FOUNDATION CENTRE FOR
BLACK THEOLOGY

My parents came from a Caribbean farming community and I grew up with an implicit reverence for nature and the land. As a student, I read the New Internationalist and became aware of the ways the economic system, capitalism, is degrading the land and destroying communities in the UK and across the world. I studied liberation theology and began to see liberation as holistic, going beyond individual salvation to something that embraced social justice and environmental justice.

I began to see the Pentecostal tradition as dominated by North American and European ways of seeing creation as a source of bounty, a resource to be exploited, deeply connected to capitalism, where the land is viewed as God's provision for us to use up, burn up, and extract it as resource for our benefit until Jesus comes again. So many of our churches are captive capitalism with a religious face, the megachurch aesthetic is the definition of a successful church.

The dominant framing in many church traditions focusses on blessing, bounty, God showering unlimited resources on his people – which in turn is connected to global capitalism, to a discourse that supports the exploitation of natural resources for economic benefit – which is fundamentally opposed to environmental and social justice. This perspective is amply demonstrated by the songs that dominate our communal worship. All the songs are about blessing, bounty and victory. Where is the room for lament? There is no room for acknowledging the pain, the grief, the suffering. Where are the songs for rage?

**WITHIN YOUR OWN CHURCH COMMUNITY,
HOW MIGHT YOU CREATE SPACE FOR
CLIMATE GRIEF, AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER
TO TAKE ACTION FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE?**

For support, email campaigns@christian-aid.org



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REV ALTON BELL
SENIOR PASTOR AT WEMBLEY
FAMILY CHURCH

For me, environmental justice is deeply connected to issues of the enslavement of Africans and the birth of capitalism. The rewards from enslavement fuelled the industrial revolution, put the 'great' into Great Britain. They used the proceeds from slavery and colonialism to build an infrastructure in this country to colonise India, Africa, Asia – and by extracting the resources from those places, were able to develop steam trains, industry, which paved the way for the electrification of the world.

The processes which have led to the increase in carbon emissions started with enslavement. The structural and historic inequalities created through enslavement and indentured labour in South Asia and China, have led to the degradation of the environment we are witnessing now.

Our forebears were bewitched by a colonial Christianity, and rather than promoting a decent life now, focussed on enduring suffering in the hope of a better life in the hereafter. This was built on the false premise of white supremacy and we need to set people free from that mind-set by educating our congregations. We need a theological understanding about the now and the not yet, about what stewardship really means, and about eschatology. We should not take a simplistic view of a New Heaven and a New Earth.

Furthermore, we need to implement the Biblical concept of Jubilee. In scripture (Luke 19:8) Zacchaeus said, "if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Historic churches must take the lead in the process of reparation and acknowledge that they have benefited greatly from historic exploitation. And look for ways of rebalancing and paying reparations to those who have been robbed.

**BECOME A CLIMATE JUSTICE CHURCH
AMBASSADOR FOR CHANGE. DISCOVER THE
SUPPORT AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT TOOLS
THAT CHRISTIAN AID CAN PROVIDE TO EQUIP
YOU IN TAKING ACTION WITH OTHERS.**

Visit www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns

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MELANIE NAZARETH CHRISTIAN CLIMATE ACTION

I think of myself as a reluctant activist. I had been loosely supportive of campaigns for fair trade and global south debt relief, I'd even taken my children to a Climate Coalition event, but had not given serious thought to environmental issues. And then in 2018, I happened to be walking through London, and came across an extraordinary scene of celebration and protest on Waterloo Bridge and stopped to find out more. This was Extinction Rebellion's second big action in London and I was utterly compelled by what I heard about the climate crisis, its impact on communities around the world and the need for urgent action. The Pacific Islands where I grew up are already facing erosion, those communities' way of life is disappearing. I immediately saw the connection to my faith, saw that the climate crisis amplified every other social injustice. It felt like a call from God, I knew I had to get involved. I knew almost nothing about XR at the time and was taken aback at how welcoming they were to me, dressed incongruously in my lawyerly suit in this carnival atmosphere.

It grieves me that Christians are not encouraged to use their prophetic voice more in this work. We are Christ's hands and feet on earth. Ours is a radical faith. There are more than 2 billion Christians across the world and we could make a huge difference. My own church is reluctant to speak out, it's a fairly wealthy congregation, perhaps invested in the status quo. They are happy to talk about recycling and green energy and donating to Christian Aid, but not about the real systemic change that's needed. It can be hard to be a lone voice. Being part of Christian Climate Action (the XR group for Christians) has been very important. We find great encouragement and support from each other. I see activism as critical, because we don't have the time to take things slowly, to persuade government through petitions and lobbying. Creation faces a crisis and urgent action is needed.

COULD YOUR CHURCH DEDICATE A SUNDAY TO CLIMATE JUSTICE? WHAT KINDS OF ACTIVISM WOULD YOU LIKE TO EXPLORE TOGETHER?

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USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

- **CHRISTIAN AID 'BLACK LIVES MATTER EVERYWHERE' REPORT**
Download your copy at www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/our-work/black-lives-matter-everywhere-report
- **PRAY WITHOUT CEASING: JOIN OUR PRAYER CHAIN FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE**
Sign up to fill a slot as an individual or church community, to help us fill every day with prayer ahead of the crucial UN climate talks, COP26 and beyond. Email us at campaigns@christian-aid.org for the latest prayer points or for support planning an event.
- **THE STORY OF US, CAMPAIGNS SKILLS TRAINING**
As highlighted in Christian Aid Black Lives Matter Everywhere Report, Black Christians want to speak up more on the climate crisis. Christian Aid is excited to offer an online workshop to you and your church to equip you to tell your own story of climate justice and how you can effectively communicate that - and your church's engagement - to the wider community. For more info, please contact campaigns@christian-aid.org
- **CHRISTIAN AID CLIMATE JUSTICE TOOL**
A guide to help Black faith leaders and Christians explore climate justice and positive action in bible study groups, sermons and wider community outreach. For more info, please contact campaigns@christian-aid.org
- **GHANA YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT (GYEM)**
Our vision is to work towards a sustainable environment and a just world for ours and future generations. We envision a sustainable and just planet as one with clean air and water, protected land and ocean, and sustainable food and energy to support every person and community to live a happy, safe and healthy life. gyemgh.org
- **SOUTHWARK DIOCESE ECO CHURCH RESOURCES**
Visit southwark.anglican.org/help/jpic/environment and email laura.baggaley@southwark.anglican.org for further support.

- **CHRISTIAN CLIMATE ACTION**
A community of Christians supporting each other to take meaningful action in the face of imminent and catastrophic anthropogenic climate breakdown. We are inspired by Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit. Following the example of social justice movements of the past, we carry out acts of public witness, non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to urge those in power to make the changes needed.
christianclimateaction.org
- **MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION**
MJR is a Christian organisation. We believe it is God's unconditional, loving intention that all people should have the right to justice, dignity, skills, equality and a chance to work and hope for the future.
www.mjr-uk.com
- **SHARE YOUR NEWS**
We want to celebrate all things creation care and would love to hear from you! If you're pursuing an environmental activity, however small, we would love to help. Please tell us about it by emailing campaigns@christian-aid.org
- **ABOUT STORYBOOK DESIGNER AND ARTIST FAN SISSOKO**
Fan is a human-centred designer and researcher based in Reykjavik. She works with charities and the public sector to improve health, care and food systems. She is also an artist whose work revolves around storytelling. www.whatfandoes.com

