Prayer guide
for the care
of creation

August 2018

“He has made everything beautiful in its time, He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure for ever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.”

(Ecclesiastes 3.11-14)

“The most important prayer in the world is just two words long: 'Thank you'.”

(Meister Eckhart)

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**Wednesday 1st August**

The Church of England General Synod has voted almost unanimously to divest by 2023 from oil and gas companies not on track to meet the Paris Agreement target of limiting global average temperature rise to well below 2°C. above pre-industrial levels. We pray that all branches of the Christian family will come to a similar decision, but with a shorter time scale in the light of growing evidence of the effects of climate change.

**Thursday 2nd August**

Money invested in our high street banks continues to be used for unsustainable extraction and burning of fossil fuels. The Big Shift is Christian Aid's campaign to urge these banks to shift their investments away from fossil fuels and into clean renewable energy. At the Greenbelt festival this month, Christian Aid is inviting everyone to visit their 'Bank of Common Good' where they can see what the banks are doing with our money and support next month's Big Shift campaign.

**Friday 3rd August**

Ireland will be the world's first country to divest entirely from fossil fuels. Its lower house of parliament has voted for its €8 billion national investment fund to sell all its investments in coal, gas, oil and peat 'as soon as possible', which is expected to mean five years. Supporters of the bill argued that existing fossil fuel resources are already far greater than can be burnt without causing catastrophic climate change, and that exploring and producing more fossil fuels is therefore morally wrong and economically risky.

**Saturday 4th August**

Writing in [The Ecologist](https://theecologist.org/2018/jul/17/what-are-hidden-costs-climate-change), Emily Folk explains the hidden costs of climate change:

1. Even where total rainfall declines, flooding events increase because warmer air holds more moisture, leading to heavier rainfall and, in many cases, devastating flooding.
2. Increasing heat waves lead to costly droughts which pose significant health risks and increase the demand for energy, which exacerbates global warming through the use of air conditioning, while electricity production declines through the lack of cooling water.
3. In the western USA wildfires burn twice as much annually as they did in 1970. Since 2000, wildfires have cost the US economy $11 billion.

**Sunday 5th August**

Father, we pray that when the interests and aspirations of nations conflict with one another over the natural resources that you have provided us with, their leaders may not turn to war, but together seek a just and acceptable way forward, so that suspicions may be allayed, misunderstandings clarified, violence averted and peace preserved. We ask this in the name of Christ our Lord.

**Monday 6th August**

The Committee on Climate Change, the Government's official advisers, in its [annual report](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee), writes that Britain is set to miss its legally-binding climate targets in the 2020s and 2030s owing to slow progress in reducing carbon emissions from industry, transport, agriculture and buildings. It calls for a route to market for cheap onshore wind (the cheapest source of renewable energy), and for a boost to home energy efficiency. The report criticises the 'chopping and changing' of energy policy which has derailed progress in energy efficiency. It also calls for long-term regulation and enforcement of existing policies.

**Tuesday 7th August**

The Mayor of London has announced a [pilot project](https://www.energiesprong.uk/newspage/mayor-supports-londons-first-ten-net-zero-energy-retrofits) for whole-house refurbishment of ten homes built between 1950 and 1980, with insulated roof and wall modules and enough solar panels to power space heating, hot water and electrical appliances. Domestic buildings are responsible for 36% of London's CO2 emissions, while the Mayor's vision is for London to become a zero-carbon city by 2050.

**Wednesday 8th August**

Cities worldwide including London, New York and Paris have come together as the [Climate Group](https://www.edie.net/news/6/Leader-businesses-and-cities-partner-up-to-spur-EV-revolution/) to ask car makers to commit to selling a minimum number of zero-emission cars by 2025 and to provide greater funding for research into batteries. Corporations including IKEA, Heathrow Airport and Vattenfall have pledged to ensure that their fleet vehicles of up to 3.5 tonnes are all-electric by 2030.

**Thursday 9th August**

Seawater is mildly alkaline, allowing shellfish and other marine organisms to form their shells of calcium carbonate. However, with increased CO2 in the atmosphere, the oceans are becoming more acidic, making it harder for shellfish to form their shells. This has knock-on effects on the entire marine food chain. Given that fish provide 20% of the protein in the diets of 3.1 million people, acidification of the oceans has a profound impact on people's lives and well-being.

**Friday 10th August**

Nitrogen is an essential element in plant growth. Since the early 20th century, the Huber-Bosch process has allowed atmospheric nitrogen to be fixed in the form of ammonia and so to be used as fertiliser for crops. This has quadrupled the productivity of agricultural land. Without it, crops would require three times their present area and it is hard to see how 7.5 billion people could otherwise be fed. However, nitrogen often runs off into rivers and seas causing excessive eutrophication, which in turn leads to the high growth of algae. When they die, they release oxygen and can cause toxic blooms, which can cause increased animal and plant deaths. Eutrophication in parts of the oceans have already led to near-lifeless zones, which now cover over 245,000 square kilometres of the world's oceans.

**Saturday 11th August**

Another essential for plant growth is phosphorus, which is mined on a large scale in Egypt, Western Sahara, Tunisia, Israel, Jordan and Togo. Phosphorus, like nitrogen, is causing eutrophication along coasts and lakes. Even more seriously, we have only 300 years' supply of known sources of phosphorus. Some scientists say that demand will exceed supply within 30 years. Without this vital nutrient, crop yields could be severely curtailed, with severe consequences for the 10 billion people expected on the planet by 2050.

**Sunday 12th August**

Father God, grant us singleness of heart and strength of purpose, that no selfish thoughts may hinder us from seeking your will, and no weakness from doing it, but that in your light we may find light in today's burning issues, and in your service we may find perfect freedom, through the sacrifice of your dear Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

**Monday 13th August**

A new book called “The Human Planet: how we created the Anthropocene” points out that human activities now move more soil, rocks and sediments than is transported by all other natural processes combined. Humankind has become a force of nature. For example, after Europeans colonised the Americas, the new diseases that they brought caused the deaths of around 50 million people. Farming collapsed and vast areas grew back to forest. These new forests removed billions of tons of CO2 from the atmosphere, as shown by sample ice cores from the Antarctic. This drop in atmospheric CO2 led directly to the global cooling period which we now call 'The Little Ice Age'' beginning from around 1600.

**Tuesday 14th August**

The book refers to another source of human influence on the planet - the nuclear tests from the mid-40s to 1963, when the Partial Test Ban Treaty was signed. Global fallout of radioactivity during that time is recorded in deposits of carbon-14, a substance which is detectable in annual tree rings and is used for radiocarbon dating. A comprehensive study of pine trees at Niepolomice in Poland, and of a spruce tree on Campbell Island in the Southern Ocean has shown a peak in carbon-14 in 1964-5 and a decline thereafter. The 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty led to an abrupt decline in radioactive fallout and this is clearly shown in the trees studied.

**Wednesday 15th August**

A report from the National Audit Office reveals that highly dangerous plutonium canisters at the Sellafield nuclear facility are decaying faster than anticipated and present an 'intolerable risk' if they start to leak. Britain has around 40% of the world's plutonium – a by-product of nuclear fuel reprocessing – stored at Sellafield, where it is managed by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. Staff are now racing against time to build a new £1 billion facility and are making contingency arrangements for the next two years while it is being constructed. Dr Doug Parr of Greenpeace comments: “It may be fortunate that this failure was detected while the plutonium is still accessible and the cost of patching up the storage arrangements is only £1 billion. If a deep waste dump were to fail in a similar way, who knows what the cost might be?”

**Thursday 16th August**

A report from the National Infrastructure Commission pours cold water on plans to invest billions of taxpayers' money in a string of new nuclear power stations. It warns against striking a deal for more than one follow-up to the Hinkley Point C project. Sir John Armitt, chairman of the NIC, said that by holding off on multiple nuclear deals, ministers could protect consumers' money since the cost of renewable technologies has plummeted, casting doubt over the economic merits of nuclear projects. “By making renewables the main players in our energy system, UK consumers could be paying the same in real terms for their energy in 2050 as they do today.”

For the rest of us, the risks and costs of endlessly adding nuclear waste to the stockpile at Sellafield in the hope that our children, or their children, will find a safe way to deal with it, makes no sense, either morally or economically.

**Friday 17th August**

A report from Policy Exchange advocating a unified carbon tax has drawn support from Labour's Alistair Darling and the Conservatives' William (Lord) Hague. It could replace existing carbon taxes when Britain leaves the European Emissions Trading Scheme. Revenue from the tax would be paid as a dividend to UK taxpayers and so boost public support for climate action. Lead author Matthew Rooney explains: “By covering the whole economy, including imports, we can address carbon leakage and ensure that we don't bury our heads in the sand by offshoring our emissions. Companies that export carbon-intensive products into the UK will be subject to the same level of carbon taxation as domestic industries, while UK exporters of these goods will be rebated at the border.” Crucially, it will secure strong public backing for action on climate change.

**Saturday 18th August**

The Government has announced the biggest [road-building](https://www.friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-change/roads-ruin-uks-most-controversial-road-plans) programme for over 20 years. It intends to spend £15 billion on 100 major road schemes in the next few years, including a network of 'expressways' with no access for bikes or buses and lots of bridges and flyovers. However, transport already accounts for 40% of our greenhouse gas emissions and much of our air pollution. As long as the vast majority of vehicles are powered by petrol or diesel, air pollution will remain a big problem. New roads will do nothing to ameliorate air quality or enable us to fulfil our legal obligations on climate change.

**Sunday 19th August**

Save us, loving Father, from over-reliance on human ingenuity and quick fixes as we strive to repair the damage we have wrought to your world. Acknowledging our reasoning powers as your great gift to us, inspire us to put our trust in you alone, who gave your Son for us and for all your creation.

**Monday 20th August**

Last November 15,000 scientists from 184 countries issued a ['Warning to Humanity'](http://www.populationmatters.org/about/campaigns-and-projects/scientists-warning-time-to-take-action), urging governments to curtail environmental destruction and to improve our stewardship of the earth. In particular, it warned that “runaway consumption of limited resources by a rapidly growing population is crippling the Earth's life support systems, jeopardising our future.” It identifies population as a 'primary driver' of the crisis. Among its 13 recommended actions are reducing fertility rates through education and family planning and rallying leaders behind the goal of establishing a sustainable human population.

**Tuesday 21st August**

On World Population Day (July 11th) eight sustainable population organisations from around the world called on governments to explain what they are doing in response to the Scientist's Warning to Humanity. This has now been signed by over 20,000 scientists, and warns specifically that:

“*Humanity has failed to make sufficient progress in solving these foreseen environmental challenges and, alarmingly, most of them are getting far worse.”*

**Wednesday 22nd August**

The 2.8 million hectare Serrania del Chiribiquete National Park in the [Colombian Amazon](http://www.wwf.org.uk/updates/colombian-reserve-becomes-worlds-largest-protected-rainforest-and-new-world-heritage-site) has recently been enlarged to 4.3 million hectares, making it the world's largest protected rainforest. It is home to 366 species of birds plus jaguars, manatees, dolphins, river otters, tapirs and the vulnerable brown woolly monkey. It owes its biodiversity to its position where four regions meet, the Amazon, Andean, Orinocan and the Guyanas. UNESCO has declared it a World Heritage Site in recognition of its 'outstanding universal value' for nature and people.

**Thursday 23rd August**

How can Britain develop a circular economy, where waste is eliminated and resource efficiency is prioritised? Peter Jones of Ecolateral, which advises the Government on resource efficiency, makes these suggestions:

* Make producers responsible at the point of sale for the whole-life costs of each product. This could cut government borrowing by up to £6 billion a year.
* Adjust VAT post-Brexit by penalising those who seek a free ride in disposing of used items.
* Eliminate tax avoidance by global companies by introducing a carbon tax to replace income and corporation taxes.
* For all waste-operator licences introduce a mandatory reporting system that delivers sound data.

**Friday 24th August**

From today until next Monday the [Greenbelt Festival](http://www.greenbelt.org.uk/info/a-greener-festival/) takes place at Boughton House near Kettering. Travel to festivals usually makes up 60-80% of their carbon footprint. For a festival of 10,000 people that's a massive 120 tonnes of CO2. To offset this, people are invited to donate £3 for a typical 150-mile journey, and the charity Energy Revolution uses the donations to invest in renewable energy projects.

**Saturday 25th August**

The annual [Earth Overshoot Day](https://www.businessgreen.com/bg/news/3036313/earths-resources-consumed-in-ever-greater-destructive-volumes) marks the point at which consumption of the earth's resources exceeds the capacity of nature to regenerate. In 1970 that day was October 15th,ten years ago it was August 15th. This year it was August 1st. According to the Global Footprint Network, in order to maintain our current appetite for resources, we would need the equivalent of 1.7 Earths. But the trend is reversible. By replacing 50% of meat consumption with a vegetarian diet, we could push back overshoot day by 5 days. Efficiency improvements in buildings and industry could make a difference of three weeks, and a 50% reduction of our carbon footprint would give us an extra three months of breathing space.

**Sunday 26th August**

“Unlike plagues of the dark ages or contemporary diseases we do not yet understand, the modern plague of overpopulation is soluble by means we have discovered and with resources we possess.” (Martin Luther King).

Loving Father, forgive us that while many seek to live sustainable by travelling less, conserving energy and consuming less, we for so long have turned a blind eye to the impact of our numbers on your world. Forgive us for our ignorance and unwillingness to face the truth. Help us to think deeply and honestly about the choices we have to make if we are to reduce our impact on a finite world.

**Monday 27th August**

In 1800 there were fewer than 1 billion people on earth. Today there are 7.6 billion and, according to the UN, there is likely to be [30% more of us](http://www.populationmatters.org/three-million-more-people-in-a-decade-is-englands-growth-sustainable/) by 2050 and 11 billion by 2100, each of them competing for the earth's finite resources. People need land, food, water and shelter. Everyone places demands on the planet – demands which cause the changes that now threaten both us and the natural world on which we all depend.

**Tuesday 28th August**

There are ways in which we can ease the pressure on our world. Those who have far more than others must demand less. We can all buy less, re-use and recycle more, move towards a plant-based diet and live as sustainably as possible. But as long as our numbers grow, the value of what we do risks being cancelled out by the demands and needs of additional people. We need

* To empower women to choose their family size, by education and social change
* To give people the help they need to lift themselves out of poverty
* To ensure that everyone has access to modern family planning
* To challenge beliefs and social norms that encourage large families and oppose contraception
* To encourage people to have smaller families wherever they have the choice.

**Wednesday 29th August**

The Government has promised a new [Environmental Principles and Governance Bill](https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/governments-post-brexit-environment-plan-isnt-good-enough-can/) to cover air pollution, waste, water and chemicals post-Brexit. The Environmental Audit Committee is calling on the Government to go much further and to enshrine biodiversity targets, soil quality targets and access to justice into UK law, so as to ensure that the enforcement, oversight and policy functions now carried out by the European commission and the European Court of Justice are not lost when we leave the EU. A new Environmental Enforcement and Audit Office (EEAO) should:

* Oversee all public authorities including local councils;
* Have power to take the Government and all public bodies to court where standards are breached;
* Have power to initiate its own investigations, including complaints brought by the public which the courts can then adjudicate;
* Provide scrutiny of the Government's 25-year Plan with legally-binding targets for every 5 years;
* Provide targets and propose policies for the restoration and recovery of nature.
* The EEAO must be accountable to and overseen by Parliament to guarantee its independence from Government and to prevent its budget being cut.
* The Government needs to set out detailed delivery and funding proposals for the Plan, and all departments across Whitehall need to commit to its ambitions rather than trying to water them down behind the scenes.

**Thursday 30th August**

Under EU law, citizens can complain about public authorities which breach environmental laws. Under the Government's 25-year Plan there is no such right. There should be a complaints mechanism so that every one of us is able to report breaches of environmental standards. Also, the new environmental watchdog must be properly funded, with access to the experts it needs. The new Bill is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enshrine environmental principles and targets in law to cover crucial issues like water quality, wildlife and biodiversity, ocean-polluting plastic waste and ensuring that we breathe as clean air as possible.

**Friday 31st August**

Tomorrow marks the Pope's World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation when the Catholic community around the world is encouraged to pray for our common home. Resources can be found at <https://cafod.org.uk/News/Campaigning-news/World-Day-of-Prayer>

Many churches celebrate the period from September 1st to October 4th as Creation Time. EcoCongegation Scotland has produced material for every week on the theme “Passing our Planet on: God's gift to us”. A film called “Global Healing” has been produced at the Eden Project, Hilfield Friary and a wind farm in Cambridge. A trailer of it can be seen at: <https://vimeo.com/271687885/760c8cd084>

**Sources:**

* “Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene” by Simon Lewis and Hugh Maslin.
* The Environment (CIWEM)
* [www.businessgreen.com](http://www.businessgreen.com)
* [www.edie.net](http://www.edie.net/)

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