
Prayer guide for the care of creation



November 2012

“Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods. Then the Lord’s anger will burn against you and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you.”
(Deuteronomy 11.15-17)

“Coming before God in prayer is the central God-given human task, the one by which, whether spectacularly or quietly, everything is transformed.”

(Bishop Tom Wright)

“Some people think of prayer as the means to get God to do things for us. That is not the primary purpose of prayer. The primary purpose is to bring the whole of life into the presence of God for cleansing and decision-making.”

(Selwyn Hughes)



Thursday 1st November

This year's harvest has been disastrous in many countries, but there is little evidence that political leaders have grasped the magnitude of what is happening. Feeding the world's hungry now depends on new population, energy and water policies. Unless we move quickly to adopt those policies, the goal of eradicating hunger will remain a pipedream.

Friday 2nd November

Most of the nearly 1 billion people who are chronically hungry and malnourished live in the Indian subcontinent and sub-Saharan Africa. Rising food prices are leaving millions of children dangerously under-nourished. As a result, 48% of all children in India are stunted physically and mentally. They are likely to have IQs on average 10-15 points lower than well-nourished children.

Saturday 3rd November

The Agricultural Christian Fellowship celebrates its 50th birthday today with a conference at Stoneleigh Agricultural Centre, Warwickshire. ACF brings together Christians in agriculture, horticulture and related activities to provide a Christian

response to the blessings, challenges and problems of food production in relation to God's creation. Lord Donald Curry, adviser to the UK Government, and Sir John Houghton will review changes in agriculture since 1945, leading to discussion groups and a closing talk by Professor Tim Gorringe. Please pray for enlightened decisions by governments and the EU over care of farmers and the agrobiodiversity so essential for food supply.

Sunday 4th November

Father, we pray for the farmers of this world as they face growing demands to increase productivity from finite resources of land and water. Give to our politicians the wisdom to put feeding the hungry above the transient needs of national economies, and for church leaders to show how Jesus pointed the way.

Monday 5th November

A survey of five countries by Save the Children reveals that 24% of families in India now have foodless days. For Nigeria the comparable figure is 27%. The survey found that family size plays an important role in hunger. Almost one-third of large families in

Additional Prayers

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Picture on front cover: Cobwebs by Poppy Pickard at Compton Verney

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the countries surveyed had foodless days.

Tuesday 6th November

Each year the world adds nearly 80 million people to its numbers. Tomorrow there will be another 219,000 mouths to feed, many of them sitting at empty plates. Relentless population growth is putting excessive pressure on land and water resources in many countries, making it ever more difficult for farmers to keep up with the demand.

Wednesday 7th November

As incomes rise, particularly in East Asia, people consume more meat, milk and eggs. China now consumes twice as much meat as the USA. 35% of the annual grain harvest is used to feed animals. With soybeans, nearly all the output ends up as animal feed. Both pork and poultry rearing has increased dramatically in China and this is heavily dependent on grain, whereas beef and milk production depends more on a combination of grass and grain, though India has built the world's largest dairy industry mainly on crop residues such as straw, corn stalks and grass collected from the roadside.

Thursday 8th November

Alongside the shortfall in this year's harvest lies the fact that in 2011 32% of all US grain production went to ethanol distilleries to provide fuel for vehicles. As a result, there is competition for the grain harvest between the affluent owners of the world's 1 billion motor vehicles and the world's poorest people. The grain required to fill the 25-gallon tank of a sport utility vehicle would feed one person for a whole year.

Friday 9th November

The EU set a target for member countries to source 10% of transport fuel from biofuels including food-based biofuels. Now the European Commission proposes to cut the use of food-based biofuels to 5% so as to stimulate the growth of non-food feedstock. The biofuel industry is threatening to sue the Commission, claiming that it would jeopardise 450,000 jobs in the industry. FoE Europe comments: "Biofuels are not the solution to making transport greener and are instead making climate change worse and pushing up food prices and hunger. In a world where almost a billion people go hungry, it's time for President Barroso

to call a halt to this madness of burning food.”

Saturday 10th November

The biofuel industry claims that greenhouse gas emissions from biofuels are lower than those from petrol and diesel, but a study by Nobel prizewinner Paul Crutzen reports that the nitrogen fertilisers used to produce biofuels “release nitrous oxide emissions large enough to cause climate warming instead of cooling.” The US National Academy of Sciences has also voiced concern about biofuel production’s negative effects on soils, water and the climate.

Sunday 11th November

Father, we thank you for your great gifts of wisdom and ingenuity. Help us to place them wholly at your service in the quest for technologies to protect the world that you created, and all the creatures that live in it.

Monday 12th November

Both for economic and environmental reasons, we would all benefit by shifting from liquid fuels to electric cars. Using electricity from wind farms, solar cells or geothermal power plants

would dramatically reduce carbon emissions. We now have the technology to create a clean carbon-free transportation system that does not rely on either the use of oil or the conversion of food crops into fuel.

Tuesday 13th November

Nearly one-third of the world’s cropland is losing topsoil faster than new soil is forming, so reducing the land’s fertility. Soil that was formed on a geological time scale is being lost on a human time scale. The rangelands that support 3.4 billion cattle, sheep and goats are threatened by the overgrazing that leaves them vulnerable to erosion. Land hunger drives farmers ever further up mountainsides where sloping land not protected by terraces is prone to erode, leading to silting up of rivers and reservoirs. Pakistan’s Mangla and Tarbela reservoirs, which store Indus River water for the country’s irrigation network, have in 40 years lost one-third of their storage capacity as they fill with silt from deforested watersheds.

Wednesday 14th November

A giant dustbowl is forming in North-West China where, according to Wang Tao, a leading desert researcher, China’s 84 million cattle, sheep and

of geothermal generating capacity by 2025, which would meet 56% of current electricity needs.

Wednesday 28th November

Singapore’s water supply is severely restricted by geography, but relies on a graduated water tax – the more you use, the more you pay – plus a far-reaching water recycling regime to meet the needs of its 5 million people. The key to raising water use efficiency is in the pricing policy. Because water is regarded as a free resource, especially when used for irrigation, it is used wastefully. This must change.

Thursday 29th November

No-till agriculture implies drilling seeds directly through crop residues into undisturbed soil, so retaining moisture, raising organic matter content and reducing energy use for tillage. If necessary, weeds are controlled by herbicides.

In the USA the no-till area went from 7 million hectares in 1990 to 26 million in 2007, largely in the production of corn and soybeans. Brazil and Argentina each have 26 million hectares under no-till cultivation.

Friday 30th November

Lester Brown concludes: “Food is the weak link in our modern civilisation, just as it was for many past civilisations. They could not separate their fate from their food supply. Nor can we.”

After Pearl Harbour, the American government banned the production of cars, forcing the auto industry into arms manufacturing. If the USA could transform its economy in a matter of months in 1942, surely, writes Lester Brown, we could lead the world in restructuring the energy economy, stabilising population and rebuilding world grain stocks.

Sources:

“Full Planet, Empty Plates: the New Geopolitics of Food Security” by Lester Brown (Norton 2012)

www.edie.net

agriculture is largely mechanised and employs few people. Land has become part of a global power struggle for control of the earth's land and water resources.

Saturday 24th November

Today is Buy Nothing Day in Britain, when we can challenge ourselves, our families and friends to switch off from shopping and tune into life. Anyone can take part provided they spend a day without spending. Everything we buy has an impact on the environment.

Buy Nothing Day highlights the environmental and ethical costs of consumerism, where 20% of the world's population consumes over 80% of its natural resources.

www.buynothingday.co.uk

Sunday 25th November

Help us, dear Father, so to deal with the things that we possess that they may never possess us.

May we so order our lifestyle that we may tread lightly on your earth.

May all the good things that you have entrusted to us be used in your service and for the glory of your Kingdom.

Amen.

Monday 26th November

"Can we prevent a food breakdown?" asks Lester Brown.

In countries such as the USA where only 9% of incomes goes to buy food, price rises are easily accommodated. In countries where 50-70% of income is spent on food, many families are down to one meal a day, if that. Brown urges simultaneous action on four fronts:

1. Stabilise world population
2. Eradicate poverty
3. Reduce excessive meat consumption
4. Reverse biofuel policies that encourage the wasteful use of land, food and water that could otherwise be used to feed people.

Tuesday 27th November

On the supply side, we need to restructure our taxes by lowering income taxes and raising carbon taxes, so that the true costs of climate change are reflected in market prices. If we also remove the massive subsidies to fossil fuel industries, we will move even faster.

Solar power in Europe already meets the electricity needs of 15 million households. Kenya now gets 20% of its electricity from geothermal sources. Indonesia aims to develop 9,500 MW.

goats are stripping the land of its protective vegetation. Between 1975 and 1987 an average of 810 sq. miles a year turned into desert. Since then the annual figure has climbed to 1,390 sq. miles. South Korea suffered dust storms originating from China's deserts on an average of 39 days a year in the 1980s, 77 days in the 1990s and 118 days from 2000 to 2011.

Thursday 15th November

Nigeria's population has grown from 47 million in 1961 to 167 million in 2012, while in the same period its livestock has increased from 8 million to 109 million. The forage needs of its livestock far exceed the sustainable yield of its grasslands. As grasslands disappear from over-grazing, they are succeeded by desert shrubs, while cattle and sheep are succeeded by goats which feed on the shrubs and prevent regeneration. The same story can be told in Pakistan, where cattle population more than doubled between 1961 and 2000, while the goat population grew almost sevenfold.

Friday 17th November

70% of the world's use of freshwater is for irrigation. Humans drink on

average nearly 4 litres of water a day, but it takes 2,000 litres to produce the food each of us consumes daily. Not everyone realises that a future of water shortages will also be a future of food shortages. In the Middle East, Turkey's ambitious plans to dam the Euphrates and Tigris to create electricity means, according to some analysts, that Syria will lose 30% of its water supply and Iraq will lose at least 60%. Water shortages translate into food shortages, which, as we saw in 2008, translate into food riots and political instability.

Saturday 17th November

Today the annual members' meeting of Christian Ecology Link takes place at 2 pm in St. Mary's Church, Eversholt Street, Euston, London NW1 1BN. The Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development (www.fdsd.org) will run a workshop to help shape a new manifesto for a democracy that will meet challenges such as climate change, resource scarcity and the stresses of growing and ageing populations. Bring your own lunch to eat at the adjoining Magdalen Centre before the meeting. Drinks provided.

Sunday 18th November

Give us, loving Father, a deeper understanding of your purposes, that we may be steadfast amid the turmoil of our times.

May our faith never fail, nor our love grow cold, nor our hope become faint. May we look up and lift up our heads as we look for the redemption of your world, through the redeeming power of your dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Monday 19th November

The 1975 Nile Water agreement allocated 75% of the river's flow to Egypt, 25% to Sudan and none to Ethiopia. Unfortunately for Egyptians, both Ethiopia and the two Sudans are the principal targets for land acquisitions by wealthier foreign states and agribusinesses. Egypt's wheat yields are already among the highest in the world, so expansion of her agriculture can only come from land elsewhere, while her population, currently 83 million, is projected to reach 101 million by 2025. Both Ethiopia and the two Sudans have their populations growing even faster – from 216 million now to 272 million by 2025.

Tuesday 20th November

Malawi experienced a drought in 2005 which left many of its 13 million people hungry or starving. Funded partly by outside donors, its government issued coupons to small farmers entitling them to fertilisers and seed corn at little or no cost. Within two years, Malawi's corn harvest had nearly doubled.

Other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, given economic incentives and higher-yielding seeds and fertilisers, could easily double their corn yields. Political solutions are often the answer.

Wednesday 21st November

Since 1970 the earth's average temperature has risen by nearly 1 degree C. and is projected to rise a further 6 degrees C. by 2100 if we continue to burn ever more coal, oil and gas. Scientists in the Philippines have studied the effects of temperature on the pollination of rice. From 100% pollination at a temperature of 34 degrees C. it falls to near zero at 40 degrees C., leading to crop failure.

Scientists at Ohio University found that photosynthetic activity in leafy plants increases up to a temperature of 20 degrees C., then plateaus up to 35 degrees C., then declines until at

40 degrees C. it ceases altogether. Scientists have concluded that "temperature increases due to global warming will make it increasingly difficult to feed Earth's growing population."

Thursday 22nd November

The USA is now the world's main producer of soybeans, with Brazil a close second. The reason for the steep rise in soybean production was the discovery that, added to grain, it could sharply boost the efficiency with which livestock and poultry converted grain into animal protein.

Large quantities of soybeans are used in China's pork industry, where half the world's pigs are reared, while much of its soybeans are fed to its farmed fish.

World demand for soybeans is increasing by 7 million tons a year and much of the increase comes from Brazil, where deforestation continues at an alarming rate. This deforestation is largely driven by the global demand for meat, milk and eggs. Put simply, as Lester Brown explains in "Full Planet, Empty Plates", saving the Amazon rainforest depends on curbing the demand for soybeans by stabilising population worldwide as soon as possible. For the world's more

affluent population, it means eating less meat and thus slowing the growth in demand for soybeans. This has already begun to happen in the USA owing to the economic downturn.

Friday 23rd November

In 2008 world grain and soybean prices more than doubled. While some exporting countries restricted grain exports, many importing countries looked towards land in other countries in which to produce food for their own people. This process has been called "land grabs". Saudi Arabia's population has simply run out of its land and water resources. It is fast losing its irrigation water and will soon be totally dependent on food imports. South Korea, China and India are among other countries which have bought or leased land in Ethiopia, South Sudan and other African countries. As Faton Mbaye of ActionAid observes: "Land is quickly becoming the new gold, and right now the rush is on."

Often local farmers have no formal ownership of the land, so they are absent from the negotiating table and do not learn about the agreements until the papers have been signed and they are being evicted and left without land or livelihoods in a situation where