

Storm of hope

Hope let loose with Christian Ecology Link

ChristianEcologyLink

The problems our planet faces today are more than a consequence of bad behaviour. At their root is a crisis of human values.

The latest predictions of climate change and damage to ecosystems mean that we have less than a decade to take up the challenge of rapid, thorough and lasting transformation. We have left it so late that the challenge is now beyond normal human capacities.

Our faith is a gift we ordinary Christians can make in these extraordinary times. It is time for an ecological conversion.

We are social animals and must make this exodus together. That is why CEL seeks to become, in the words of Jim Wallis, 'an alternative community, living a new way of life, visibly demonstrating the values of Jesus and the kingdom of God'.

It is not just CEL which believes that the environmental movement needs a new direction. A recent WWF report, *Weathercocks and Signposts*, criticises environmental campaigns which appeal to our society's individualism and materialism, when they should be dismantling them. It says that any strategy which does not challenge those prevailing values is doomed to fail.

What are the values which should take their place? Here we offer our reflections on just two possibilities: wonder and love. You may want to suggest others. Join us in finding the good news for our time.



George says ...

Since becoming a Christian 15 years ago I had found a huge mismatch between my long-held 'secular' passion for the environment and my faith. No Christians ever seemed to mention care for the earth, at least not in the way in which I understood it. The inevitable result was that I kept both these parts of my life separate – which often felt very uncomfortable. Discovering CEL has enabled these seemingly conflicting areas to fall into place. It continues to provide a supportive and creative community of fellow Christians who are working together to share ideas, resources and activities with which I can raise awareness in my own church.

► Wonder

Our capacity for wonder goes beyond simple awareness of our creatureliness before God our Creator. It combines our sense of 'beauty' and our sense of joy in Creation in all its richness, as well as our awareness of the darker side of human nature and existence. So human wonder includes elements of appreciation and celebration, horror and fear. Often it is through participation in liturgy that our wonder is cultivated. As we lift up all of Creation to God in worship we recall the victims of ecocide and 're-member' ourselves as part of the living Earth. Through our collective re-membering, a change in our way of life becomes possible.

► Love

In CEL we are learning to love Creation as gift, as it is in itself, and as an expression of the love of God. The Earth has value in and of itself. We do not manage or steward the Earth for human benefit alone. Rather, in quiet moments we can let the Earth be, and listen for what the voice of Creation might be saying. Because the Earth is the Lord's, the more open we are to the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit, the more we find ourselves determined to protect the natural world. The glory of God is revealed in the cosmos fully alive.

Inside we show how CEL is seeking to grow as a community rooted in the values of the gospel.

*My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
so much has been destroyed*

*I have to cast my lot with those
who age after age, perversely,*

*with no extraordinary power,
reconstitute the world.*

(Adrienne Rich)

The most comprehensive assessment of the world's mammals has confirmed an extinction crisis, with almost one in four at risk of disappearing forever, according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.



Ellen says ...

The CEL community offers hope and solidarity to me. When it was founded in the 1980s, very few church people were interested in environmental justice, and it was literally a lifeline that there were individuals and groups out there who valued the natural world and saw its destruction as being sinful. The wonderful website, maintained with such vision and commitment, offers an invaluable diary of events and resources which raises awareness, offers liturgy ideas, and explores creation theology. The CEL network is truly an inclusive and holistic community which is a beacon for the churches regarding the new ecological realities of our time.



Nourishing a new creation

Interconnection lies at the heart of our faith. In the Trinity, no less, we discover that God is community. CEL helps people to restore some of this connectedness to the broken world in which we live. Here are some of the ways in which we are trying to rebuild the connections once more.



Prayer

In prayer we celebrate the presence of Christ in the midst of Creation. We acknowledge Christ's redeeming power for all brokenness, including sinful humanity.

Our inherited patterns of prayer can seem a feeble response to the devastation around us, and to our own contributions to the tragedy. Much corporate prayer in our churches ignores the needs of Creation altogether.

CEL's Community of Prayer invites you to participate in a regular time for prayer, offers an online forum for sharing prayers, and provides a prayer guide. Praying for the Earth can feel lonely and daunting at times. As a member of the CEL Prayer Community you will find the support of fellow members.

Churches

Many of us belong to a worshipping community. But we may also long for our congregations to discover the fulness of our Christian witness to the Earth. It can be frustrating to see the indifference or scepticism of our fellow believers. You may feel called to challenge the status quo, suffering the discomfort of staying put and yet feeling 'on the edge'. You might feel drawn to another church where people see things the way you do.

CEL has a special role to help you stick with a congregation which doesn't 'get it'. We will offer you the support you need to keep a clear vision and a courageous heart, and, when the time is right for your church, provide the resources for learning and change. It is our hope that all churches will encourage members and the wider community of which they are a part to act in ways that reflect ecological integrity. As local collective groups, churches do have the power to effect change.

Localities

As Christians we are challenged to embrace both the global and the local. It is only in the small changes to our own lives and in the world about us the kingdom of God is realised.

Some of our members, for instance, are involved in the Transition Town movement. Others may work to preserve a local wildlife site. Yet others may be active in politics. Whatever your interests and affiliations, in CEL you can help your response take shape according to the needs of your own locality, and your experience of the place where you live.

CEL's Prayer Guide

Our Prayer Guide for the Care of Creation will not tell you how to pray, but it will give you thought-provoking insights into our predicament, and enable you to make your own response. Here is a typical day's entry from a recent issue.

The Earth is covered, on average, with just three feet of topsoil, the layer that provides most of the world's food crops. Healthy topsoil is home to billions of beneficial micro-organisms per handful plus the nutrients, fungi and worms that are critical to healthy plant life. Topsoil forms at a rate of 1-2 inches per several hundred years. The US National Academy of Sciences estimates that cropland is eroding at 10 times the rate that it forms. Pollution, changing weather patterns and urban development are all contributors to topsoil loss. But, according to John Reganold of Washington State University, the worst culprit is modern agricultural practices.

At first people refuse to believe that a strange new thing can be done. Then they begin to hope it can be done. Then they see it can be done. Then it is done, and the world wonders why it was not done.

We will be pleased to send the Prayer Guide to you free of charge by email, each month or daily. Contact us for your copy or download it from our website.

Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.

For before those days there were no wages for people and for animals, nor was there any safety from the foe.

There shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

From Zechariah, chapter 8

► ecocell

CEL's new resource for groups, *ecocell*, invites Christians and their friends on a journey of practical discipleship for the 21st century. Through mutual support, friendship and reflection the programme helps you to find your way towards restoring broken connections with the Creator, one another and Creation.

The seven modules invite you to measure your impacts in waste, shopping and food, energy in the home, water, transport and travel, and then ask you to take the all-important 'next steps' towards a sustainable and just society.

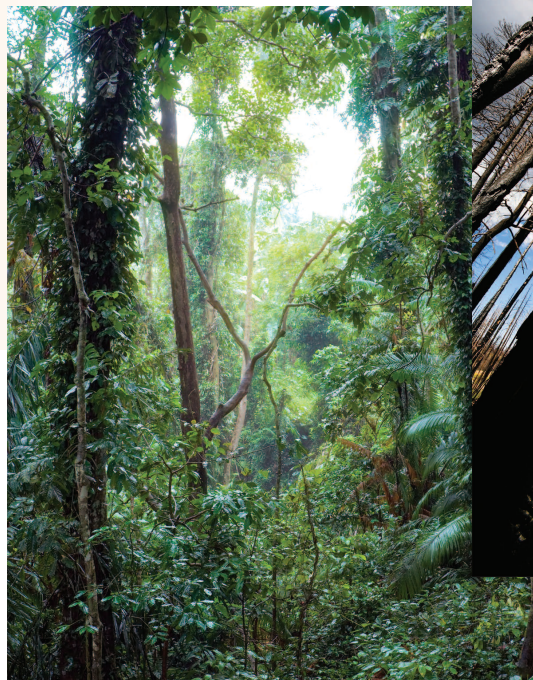
► Online

CEL has developed CELink, an Internet online community which adds further dimensions to our community life. For some members CELink proves to be a valuable lifeline of support and advice. Recent discussions via the CELink network have addressed direct action, home energy monitors, the US elections and Transition Towns, and there have been descriptions of local meetings and events.

► Gatherings, Conferences, Meetings

Opportunities for CEL members to socialise and reflect happen throughout the year, and there is room for everyone. The annual CEL **gathering** is an ideal place to tap the creative vitality of our faith through sharing experiences, meaningful worship and prayer, as well as fun and laughter. We aim for all the food at CEL's events to be based on the LOAF principles (Local, Organic, Animal Friendly and Fairly Traded). CEL **conferences** provide a structured time and place where we can learn from invited speakers, gain new insights, take part in workshops and gather resources. Although CEL committee **meetings** are more formal and agenda orientated, they are relaxed and friendly and CEL members are welcome to attend. In these different ways the life of the CEL community is shaped and sustained.

Many of our gatherings take place at Ringsfield Hall in Suffolk. Forthcoming events include a day conference at the beautiful parish church in Ottery St Mary, Devon, on November 7th where local CEL members are organizing a day inspired by the Transition Town movement. Our annual weekend gatherings are times to rejoice, lament, learn, and, oh yes, eat together! In 2010 (12-14 February) this moveable feast moves to Scarborough. Contact us for details on both these gatherings.



'There is no such thing as "human community" without the earth and the soil and the air and the water and all the living forms. Without these, humans do not exist. There is, therefore, no separate human community. Humans are woven in to this larger community. The large community is the sacred community.'

(Thomas Berry)

Nazareth earth community – Jesus' ecosystem

'With imagination we may place ourselves in hilly Nazareth with its few hundred families and their sheep and goats, oxen, cattle and donkeys. In those green and brown and stony hills, we may imaginatively observe the growing Jesus (Luke 2.40, 52) learning, especially from his mother, about the useful elder trees, the scattered Tabor oaks and Aleppo pine, the nettle, bramble, mallow, and startling yellow chrysanthemums of April, the galaxy of weeds and herbs and wild flowers which later he compared to Solomon's attire. Grapes grow and grew in Nazareth's old town, their branches nourished by the everlasting vine. Jesus wondered at their rapid growth, their ripening in the burning sun, and their harsh winter pruning; he learned about apples, almonds and pomegranates, he saw figs swarming from rocks offering two, even three crops of dripping sweetness. When they began to put out leaves, as did the other trees, he knew that summer was here (Luke 21.30).'

(Edward Echlin)



Malcolm says ...

With Earth-community under such threat, some feel it right to take peaceful direct action to speak the truth to power: for example, congratulations to the café at Climate Camp. My bit was to occupy a coal-train bound for Drax, a coal-fired power station which is the UK's biggest emitter of carbon dioxide. Obviously, the action was not in the name of CEL but how grateful I am to be part of a Christian network which inspires and gives hope.

Join us

Since 1982 CEL has been working with Christians, churches and the green movement to witness to hope in the ecological crisis.

You can become a member for £18 a year, or £10 if you are on a low income (less with a standing order). Send your details to our Information Officer using the form below.

To find out more before committing yourself, visit our extensive website: www.christian-ecology.org.uk, sign up for our free monthly news e-mail at www.christian-ecology.org.uk/membersandfriends or contact us for a free introductory pack.

Christian Ecology Link is a Registered Charity no. 328744, and a Company, reg. no. 2445198



ChristianEcologyLink

Post

Christian Ecology Link
3 Bond Street
Lancaster
LA1 3ER

Telephone

01524 36241

E-mail

info@christian-ecology.org.uk

Cheques, for the amounts not in brackets, should be made payable to *Christian Ecology Link* (subscriptions are lower for those completing the Standing Order (SO) form – see the amounts in brackets).

- ☐ Standard individual £18 (£15 by SO)
- ☐ Low income £10 (£8 by SO) eg students, pensioners, unwaged
- ☐ Joint/Family/Corporate £28 (£25 by SO)
- ☐ Church: annual donation (£25 recommended)
- ☐ I include a donation to assist your work £

If you are a UK taxpayer, you can increase your donation by 28% at no extra cost to you! Please sign the Gift Aid Declaration form.

Your details

Name:

Address:

Postcode: Telephone:

Email:

Please complete the following details to subscribe by Standing Order

Your bank: (Bank/Building Society)

Address:

Postcode:

Account name (block capitals):

Account no: Sort code:

Instruction to your bank or building society:

Please pay £ annually to Christian Ecology Link Ltd,
The Co-operative Bank, GLOUCESTER 2 BRANCH,
Sort code 08-90-54, a/c No. 70329203.

This cancels any previous order in favour of Christian Ecology Link.

Date of first payment:

Signature: Date:

Gift Aid declaration

I am a UK tax payer and I would like Christian Ecology Link to treat all donations I make, from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as Gift Aid donations.

Signature: Date:

1. Please notify CEL if you change your name or address while the declaration is still in force. You can cancel the declaration at any time by notifying the charity. It will then not apply to payments you make after that date of cancellation or such later date as you specify.
2. If you pay tax at the higher rate, you can claim further relief in your self-assessment tax return. You can obtain an Inland Revenue leaflet on Gift Aid from your local tax office.



Hope let loose

Living an alternative vision for society can be lonely – we need one another. So we provide a number of types of support. These enable us to build a body of friendships and resources which benefit each other and the wider Earth community, for now, and for the tough times ahead.

Mutual support. In CEL many of our members find kindred spirits with whom they can share thoughts and feelings that perhaps cannot be expressed in church or family life.

Local support. CEL members meet together in many parts of the country. We can let you know who your CEL neighbours are so that you can keep in touch.

Information support. We offer a comprehensive website, resources for background reading materials, relevant websites, and links to like-minded organisations.

Publicity support. We publicise members' initiatives through our Members and Friends email newsletter, our website and magazine, at regional conferences and events, and via the media (church newspapers, Christian radio stations and TV contacts).

Financial support. A small projects grant scheme can provide a church, a local group or an individual with a small sum of money to enable an idea or campaign to get going.

Last, but not least, we offer recognition, thanks and appreciation for all the contributions that you as CEL members make.

Contact our Information Officer at the address below to share in the work of CEL.

Local Works

CEL is a longstanding supporter of the Local Works campaign, which empowers us to reverse community decline and promote local sustainability. Last year the campaign succeeded in seeing the Sustainable Communities Act through parliament, shifting the balance of power from central government towards the local level. Now it is up to us to make sure the possibilities it offers are made concrete.

The Act aims to support local communities by keeping essential services open, encouraging small businesses and local food growing initiatives, and promoting renewable energy. Write to your councillors asking them to opt in to the Act, as well as to your local paper encouraging others to do the same. To date, over 20 authorities have opted in. Visit www.localworks.org.

Deborah says ...



As a CEL member, it has been comforting to know that there really are Christians who feel as I do about the environment; as a vicar's wife I rarely meet any churchgoer who cares at all. It is a lonely business. But I got to Ringsfield in February, and the remote became tangible; I put faces to names and talked with people who are passionate about God's creation, and who have a deeper wisdom about being Green than either the usual congregation or the usual environmental organisations. It was inspirational; I now feel confident in taking my message to others, in the new-found knowledge that I am not mad, merely prophetic – as all Christians should be – and just possibly a little eccentric.