

## Christianity: what has *that* got to offer on the environment?

This workshop was used in a Devon market town as part of a church stewardship project, to help members see the value of environmental stewardship, and signal to the town that the church was interested. It ran well for 15 people with variable prior knowledge and commitment. Ideas for adapting it for different numbers are given at the end. It is written for a single leader who chairs, gives a short environmental talk and leads closing worship, but these roles could be split according to skills and interests available.

### Workshop outline

#### Timing:

Working session 1.5 hours, with coffee / chat before and after.

#### Preparation:

- ❖ Arrange help with setting out room and refreshments
- ❖ Collect objects for icebreaker table (see below) and other materials.
- ❖ Prepare “challenge” talk – see website list on handout if you need ideas, quotes or statistics, – but the idea is just to give a short scene setting. Local news stories may also be relevant.
- ❖ (Optional) Find resources for groups to dip into to find prayers on the environment – eg Iona Community worship books and magazines, printouts from liturgies on websites on the handout, some denominational publications (eg the Methodist annual Prayer Handbook and magazine Magnet have useful material).

#### Setting:

- ❖ Hall with café style layout of small tables / chairs – 4-6 people at each table.
- ❖ On tables, red/yellow/green slips of paper for voting (one set per person), plus Bibles.
- ❖ Leader’s table at front. Side tables with literature to take away.
- ❖ Main table with a random selection of small objects that have an environmental link – eg fruit, nuts, landscape or flower postcards, packaging, twigs, water bottle, toy animal.
- ❖ Fair trade refreshments and stall for start and end.
- ❖ Suitable recorded music playing at start and end.

#### Introduction (20 minutes)

- ❖ Brief welcome and outline of how workshop will run.
- ❖ Everyone goes to the main table and picks 2 items that mean something to them about “environment”.
- ❖ At tables, share why you picked these (and make personal introductions if group not already known to each other). Each group chooses one item to share with the whole room.
- ❖ Opening prayer – from a suitable liturgy, or if extempore, pick up on ideas just shared.

#### The challenge (10 minutes)

- ❖ Short talk from leader covering:
  - Introductory quote or story relevant to local context.
  - Brief outline of environmental problems & human effects, eg Climate change, Loss of habitat & fertility, Pollution of air, water & land(Pitch this to likely level of current knowledge, but be clear that workshop is not focused on looking at or contesting the science.)

- ❖ Votes (yes / not sure / no - using the “traffic light” paper slips)
  - Does Christianity have contribution to tackling environmental crisis?
  - Are Christians in Britain making a this contribution well?

### **A way of thinking about the Christian contribution (30 minutes)**

- ❖ Give out handouts (last page of this note)
- ❖ Briefly outline the ARocha 24:1 model, based on Psalm 24:1 – see handout.
- ❖ Allocate each group 1 of the 3 themes to discuss (moving people between tables or combining tables if needed to get manageable numbers).
- ❖ Groups work on their discussion question and task on handout – explain that they do not need to feed back discussion, but do need to complete the task for the closing worship.

### **Underpinning with prayer (30 minutes)**

- ❖ Either keep same groups, or remix to get 3 or 4 different groups.
- ❖ Invite groups to take a selection of the prayer resources from the side table, and to pick from these one prayer that one of the group will lead in the closing worship. (Note: if used in a setting where everyone is more comfortable with extempore prayer, skip this, and instead get people to jot down some issues for thanks and intercession.)
- ❖ While groups are working, brief people involved in the final worship on the running order.
- ❖ Bring everyone together (eg in circle) – this may be a good time to collect back the items used in the icebreaker
- ❖ for closing worship, to include:
  - The Bible reading chosen by group 1
  - The energy saving challenge chosen by group 2
  - The issue for intercession chosen by group 3
  - Prayers chosen in the final session, or a time of open prayer
  - Recorded music, silence, or suitable hymn as appropriate.
  - Final blessing.

### **Note on adapting for large or small groups**

This can be scaled down as far 6 participants if they work in pairs. Some of the more structured parts eg voting could be left out, with more time for whole group discussion of ideas arising.

For large groups (30 or more), getting people organised and moving around will take longer, and there may be too much feedback to use in the way proposed. Time can be freed by the leader being more directive about the content of the final worship, and by collecting ideas from the groups, and favourite prayers, onto large sheets of paper for display. Someone could write these up eg for a church magazine article.

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From ARocha - the 24:1 idea

**The 24:1 Commitment** - believing - 'The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it' (Psalm 24:1)

**The 24:1 Challenge** - behaving - Living lightly in God's World

**The 24:1 Community** - belonging - Caring for God's World together.

## Discussion group 1 - believing

Read this extract from the Christian Ecology Link declaration "Letting loose hope". Is this a helpful interpretation of the Christian faith?

*"We believe: the Earth's resources are limited. We are using the fruits of creation faster than they can be regenerated and are enslaved to destructive behaviours. But God sets us free in Christ and the fruits of the Spirit enable us to flourish within the abundant gifts of God's creation.*

*Therefore as we acknowledge the deepest depression to which the environmental crisis exposes us, we encounter the transforming power of Jesus. This power releases hope and imagination for all to live in new ways of love, which we are passionate to share, for the sake of all life on earth."*

**Your task:** select a short Bible passage for worship at the end of the workshop. Some to consider - Mark 4v35-41, Psalm 74v16-17, Job 38v22-30, Genesis 8v22-9v13, Hosea 4v1-4.

## Discussion group 2 - behaving

Look at the checklist on climate change action. How much of this are you doing - individually and in church? What helps or hinders? Should Christians lead the way in the transformed way of living that now appears necessary?

**Your task:** choose one energy reducing action to challenge all present to take.

## Discussion group 3 - belonging

CEL suggests that one of the strengths Christians have is community. *"We support and nurture each other in Christian discipleship, providing new opportunities for hope-giving community as a witness for our times, seeking to work with others who share our values."*

What Christian-influenced environmental projects are you aware of, or might be appropriate locally? How can our meeting for worship ensure that environmental responsibility is encouraged?

**Your task:** choose an environmental issue or project that you will commit to intercede for.

## Useful resources - which all themselves have plenty of links

[www.christian-ecology.org.uk](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk)

[www.arocha.org.uk](http://www.arocha.org.uk)

[www.livinglightly24-1.org.uk](http://www.livinglightly24-1.org.uk)

[www.ecocongregation.org](http://www.ecocongregation.org)

[www.christian-aid.org.uk](http://www.christian-aid.org.uk)

[www.tearfund.org](http://www.tearfund.org)

[www.cafod.org.uk](http://www.cafod.org.uk)

[www.worldviewofglobalwarming.org](http://www.worldviewofglobalwarming.org)

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)