**26 August 2021**

**Church climate change initiative in the run-up to COP26**

In the run up to the start of COP26 in November, the United Nations’ climate conference which meets in Glasgow, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) is encouraging its congregations across Ireland to set aside one Sunday as a ‘Climate Sunday’, to focus on God’s creation and humanity’s responsibility to be good stewards of it.

In a letter to its 500-plus congregations, PCI’s Moderator, Right Reverend Dr David Bruce, set the scene for the ‘Climate Sundays’ initiative, saying that as disciples of Jesus Christ, His followers have been given the privilege and responsibility to use and care for the planet as good stewards of God’s Creation.

“Over the last few months we have witnessed some of the most destructive weather events in different parts of the world. Described as ‘terrifying’ and ‘surreal’, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland were caught up in floods that were as surprising as they were devastating. Raging wild fires in Canada and the United States became so big they created their own destructive weather patterns. It is also disturbing to learn that parts of the world’s largest tropical wetlands in South America are on fire again,” Dr Bruce wrote.

“This August alone, for the first time on record, rain has fallen instead of snow on the summit of Greenland’s huge ice cap. We have also seen devastating wild fires in Greece. It is no coincidence, when launching its landmark climate change report earlier this month, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres described what is happening around the world as ‘a code red for humanity.’

Dr Bruce continued, “Today, the overwhelming scientific consensus is that many aspects of human activity over the last 300 years have led to critical consequences for our climate. It is widely agreed that if nothing is done the geophysical changes that we are witnessing will accelerate. The negative effects of this upon those living in poverty around the world, especially in drought-ridden countries such as South Sudan, will be most severe. As God’s people we are commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves – whoever and wherever they are - by not behaving in ways which harm them. We need to respond.”

To encourage and support congregations, PCI has produced a suite of resources centrally at [**www.presbyterianireland.org/stewardshipofcreation**](http://www.presbyterianireland.org/stewardshipofcreation). These include suggested prayers and hymns, a biblical reflection and Scripture references, 10 practical steps congregations can consider taking, and a short video of Dr Bruce in conversation with Environmental Management student, Olivia Elwood, a young woman who is passionate about God’s creation and worships at Bloomfield Presbyterian in Belfast.

Speaking about the initiative, Dr Bruce said, “The theology that really works is the theology that makes a difference to life. It is one thing to say that a thing is true, but if it doesn’t impact the way that we live our lives as Christians, then it is just a thing we say that is true. But a piece of theology that actually structurally changes the way we live our lives is what the Bible is for.

“We know from Genesis 1:31, for example, that what God created He declared to be ‘very good’ and through Adam, we were asked ‘to take care of it’ (Genesis 2:15). The Psalmist also explains that “The highest heavens belong to the Lord; but the earth he has given to humanity” (Psalm 115:16.) In effect God remains the ‘landlord’, for ‘The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it’ (Psalm 24:1). While there may still be some debate regarding the degree of climate change and its causes, as Christians we can agree on this: God does not change, and neither does His word.”

Dr Bruce continued, “Over the years, we have been developing a theology of ‘creation care’ that has been brought to the fore by our changing environment and a recognition that it is delicate, our ecosystems are fragile and we have a fundamental God-given responsibility to look after it. I hope and pray we can all play our part.”

Supporting the initiative, Rev Dr Allen Sleith, a member of PCI’s Global Development Committee and Stewardship of Creation Agent said, “If creation care has for too long been a neglected aspect of our Christian faith, surely now there is a fresh urgency to address this as creatively as possible. This is a new era of repentance and transformation, one in which Jesus’ great command to ‘love God and neighbour as you love yourself’ asks us to faithfully extend that to love of our ‘neighbourhood’, each local patch as well the entire earth.

“As a church, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we can contribute something that is distinct: the revelation and inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and the theological and ethical insights that they give rise to in our search to fulfil our vocation with creative fidelity and loving care. I hope that as many of our congregations as possible are able to take part in this initiative.”

The Moderator concluded by saying, “What is happening to the earth will affect all of us in different ways for generations, but those living in abject poverty around the world will be affected the most. We need to be challenged by climate change and view it as an essential aspect of discipleship, so that we can stand in solidarity with those most affected and do what we can on this island, north and south, to stem it.

“The good news is that God hasn’t given up on us. Our Creator is in the business of re-creation, of fixing things - broken people, broken relationships, even broken planets, but that doesn’t absolve us from our responsibility to be good stewards of His creation. We all have our part to play and I would encourage our Church to pray for those in Glasgow this November. Pray that progress will be made.”