

# FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

**A SIX-SESSION STUDY COURSE**  
Exploring ecological justice

**#FORSUCHATIME**

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## INTRODUCTION

The world is in crisis; Creation is groaning. We hear the cry of the Earth in species extinction, in the climate crisis, in systematic racial injustice, in material poverty, in conflict, in the global Covid-19 pandemic (Covid-19). In such a time as this, what have Christians got to offer?

People and the Earth have been crying out for many years. But for too long, many people - particularly those in the global North - have chosen not to listen, instead remaining complicit in destruction and continuing to increase inequalities.

Our doctrine of Creation suggests that it was never meant to be like this, but that human nature is tarnished, fallen some call it. However, our biblical narrative of salvation provides a remedy and challenges us to play our part in the process of redemption and re-Creation. This is the journey that we will take together over the next six weeks looking at the implications for our daily lives both as individuals and as communities of faith and hope.

Some are describing the Covid-19 pandemic as a great awakening; a planetary 'kairos moment' for us to stop, reflect and change direction.

We live in a broken and unequal world. We are here for such a time as this. Called to respond with words and actions. USPG partners with churches across the world in their mission of transforming lives through education, health care and justice for all.

As we will witness as we move through this course, USPG's partner churches offer us insights, hope and encouragement in the ways that they are confronting the issues of ecological justice in their own context: and in doing so, challenge us to respond: are we ready to accept the challenge?

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## MAKING THE MOST OF THIS STUDY COURSE

1. Commit to attend all six sessions. The more you can attend, the more you will benefit and the more it will maintain the continuity of the group. Give yourself permission to refuse any other engagements or invitations that might arise at your regular study time.

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2. Begin each study with a short time of silence to help centre the group and recall God's presence, then pray the prayer at the beginning of each session together.

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3. Commit to sharing honestly and to listening without judgement or trying to 'fix' someone else's life for them. Seek to create a safe atmosphere in which people feel able to share openly. Remember, none of us has all the answers. Our aim is to be authentic and whole - not perfect!

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4. Acknowledge that everyone's experience of life and faith is unique and valuable. Seek to accept one another just as we truly are, just as God accepts each one of us.

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5. Give space for everyone to speak, although no-one need feel obliged to speak. If you are someone who tends to share a lot, remember to leave space for others who find it harder to share.

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6. Read the material in advance and spend time allowing the content to sink in - not necessarily needing to find the answers.

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7. Remember that religious and theological words can mean different things to different people. Share your perspective and allow others to hold different perspectives.

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8. Close each session in prayer.

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9. Commit to act. Each week you will discuss, reflect, pray and act. By changing your habits and raising funds for the world church you will be able to be part of something that is beyond your community and make a real difference. Ask everyone in your study group to create a Lent Box\* or Jar so that they can collect the money they save each week through their actions.

Finally, you will find a Glossary of Terms towards the end of this study guide on page 30.

\*USPG provides Lent Boxes they can be ordered from [www.uspg.org.uk/forsuchvertime](http://www.uspg.org.uk/forsuchvertime) Or you could use an old jam jar and decorate it.

## GREEN SCHOOLS INDIA

Any money raised or given as part for 'For Such A Time as This' will go towards The Green Schools Programme and the wider work of the Church of South India.



The Green Schools Programme was set up by the Church of South India in response to pollution in urban areas and other ecological issues facing India. The Church of South India (CSI) provides an education for many children each year. The CSI has seized the opportunity to inspire a new generation about the importance of safeguarding the environment. They are asking the pupils in their schools to respond to the environmental challenges all of us face. A child in India will breathe in polluted air in the crowded streets around them. By asking children to learn about environmental issues and respond with positive action to them, we should see a change for generations to come.

Students learn about the resources they consume; they are encouraged to use resources carefully and to take steps to safeguard our world.

Each school aims to be more efficient with the natural resources they have. For example, using less

water, improving energy efficiency, minimising waste and recycling. Through taking action, the children learn about better ways to live sustainably.

The process starts with an audit of the natural resources that they are consuming in the school. Then the children come up with ideas of how they can make changes. Children use skills from across the curriculum and must work together – so they learn vital team building skills as well.

“People are living in this world as though they have another planet to go to.” Hermani from St Hilda's School Ooty in the Diocese of Colmbatore is seeing the impact that the Green Schools is having in her school. The school harvests rainwater in large tanks and uses the water to 'flush' their toilets, for gardening, washing and cooking using steam. Children in schools across South India are putting their faith into action in caring for God's Creation.

Just as the children in schools across South India are responding, why not ask your own children, Sunday school or local school to respond to some of the activities as you work through this study course?

For more ideas and resources for children and young people, please visit: [www.uspg.org.uk/forsuchvertime](http://www.uspg.org.uk/forsuchvertime) ■



**People are living in this world as though they have another planet to go to**

## STUDY 1

# FOR SUCH A TIME

### GETTING STARTED

Before embarking on this six-week journey, let us spend some time contemplating the following questions:

- How do we value our common home, the Earth?
- In what ways do we value - or not value - all parts of Creation, including other human beings?

### A VIEW FROM THE ASIAN THEOLOGICAL ACADEMY (ATA)

At the United Nations' (UN) summit on climate change in 2019, Greta Thunberg reprimanded the world saying, 'People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you?' She prophetically said,

'You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. This is all wrong.'

Greta is not alone. Young activists around the world are enraged that their future has been 'sold' so that a small number of people may amass unimaginable fortunes. They are right to be furious.

Humanity is fast approaching a time for serious introspection; a planetary *kairos* where self-examination is warranted from leaders of religious, social, economic and political structures in order to identify their role in the ensuing ecological crisis. Recent history has deceived society into believing that economic growth and prosperity equal a good life. Non-material human needs, such as love, faith and spiritual needs have no rational space in humanity's striving for this. *Growth* remains the single objective for economic organisation, whilst this logic proposes that economic systems will collapse without the expansion of production and consumption.

In this narrative, prosperity is built on the false belief that human beings are fundamentally selfish, seeking to advance personal pleasure, identity and power.

Our planet is the principal victim of this false narrative. The argument that continued economic growth is possible due to achievements in science and technology, and the efficient management in production is a partial story.

Production depends on natural resources. Growth currently depends on the unrestricted extraction of resources - which in turn, results in the destruction of life-giving qualities of nature.

The Earth is therefore objectified as the economy strengthens in financial value, Mother Earth bleeds. This phenomenon is often called 'cancerous capitalism'; the so-called advances are interlocked with destruction. Growth and death are therefore interrelated.

In the flood narrative described in Genesis, the destruction of the Earth was the result of human sin. The author of Genesis notes these sins as the injustice and wickedness that lead to a hedonistic life.

The anguish of God after the destruction of Creation was the catalyst for a new covenant of preservation. And as the mark of the covenant, God agreed to place the bow [symbol of ruling power and authority in ancient cultures] in front of Creation. And people were required to respect life ('Do not eat flesh with blood').



**You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. This is all wrong.**



It offered a radically new set of principles for governance based on ethically grounded relationships between people, nature and God. It rejected the hierarchical order that objectified 'the other' and specified that exploiting the Earth for consumption is a rebellion towards God.

Biblical covenants are a response to the self-giving and gratuitous love of God. The covenant of preservation after the flood is not with people and God, but 'with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that

is with you: the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the Earth'. The term 'covenant' reinforces the idea that God respects people and nature. The text further reminds us that people are not above nature, but an integral part of it. It reiterates the biblical theme that the restoration of the broken relationship between nature, people and God is the fundamental concern.

This extract is taken from a longer article which you will find at: [www.uspg.org.uk/forsuchatime](http://www.uspg.org.uk/forsuchatime)

## QUESTIONS

- What is your response to the quote from Greta Thunberg?
- In what ways do we reinforce the idea that 'economic growth and prosperity equals a good life' in our personal and/or corporate lives?
- As the economy strengthens in financial value, Mother Earth bleeds.' What is your reaction to this statement?

## GENESIS 9:8-13

- <sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,  
<sup>9</sup> 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you,  
<sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the Earth with you, as many as came out of the Ark.  
<sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the Earth.'  
<sup>12</sup> God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:  
<sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth.'

## QUESTIONS

- What does the idea of being invited into a covenant mean to you?
- In what ways do you feel 'a part of nature'?
- Describe ways in which you feel responsible for nature or give examples of practical action that you have taken to support it.
- How should this impact our thinking, as a church and as a global community?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Creator God, breathing your own life into being,  
 you gave us the gift of life:  
 you placed us on this Earth  
 with its minerals and waters,  
 flowers and fruits,  
 living creatures of grace and beauty.

You gave us the care of the Earth.

Teach us, Creator God of Love,  
 that the Earth and all its fullness is yours,  
 the world and all who dwell in it.

Call us yet again to safeguard the gift of life.

*Christian Conference of Asia*

## ACT

This week, look at how much energy you consume. Take steps to reduce the electricity, gas or oil you use in your home. Why not try using energy-efficient light bulbs? Turn your thermostat down by 2 degrees. Try using an airer instead of a tumble dryer. Consider having a (free) Smart Meter installed to help you understand where you use the most energy and perhaps reduce your usage.

For each action you take put £1 in your Lent box or jar. ■



## STUDY 2

# CREATION

### GETTING STARTED

In Study 1, we looked at the crisis facing the world and recognised that our selfishness and greed are largely to blame. This raised the question: was it meant to be like this? Was this the Creator's intention? What do you think?

### A VIEW FROM THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES

By the Most Rev'd Renato Abibico, former Prime Bishop, the Episcopal Church in the Philippines (ECP)

The mission work of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines is historically concentrated in and continues to grow among the indigenous communities in the northern and southern parts of the Philippine Islands. This has been a blessing and a gift as these communities continue to shape the theology of the ECP with their indigenous worldviews

that are more attuned with the Biblical command for humanity to care for, and be stewards of Creation.

To generations of indigenous Cordillera and Lumad persons, human beings share the Earth with spirits of the trees, rivers, rocks, hills and mountains. This belief inspires holy fear and deters the believers from committing any

abuse or harm on nature - because any such act is an invitation for divine retribution in the form of illness, misfortune, or disaster. This can then only be satisfied by appropriate rituals and sacrifices to the offended spirits. These worldviews are embodied in the Igorot concept of *Inayan*. This concept determines that one must do to others (and to nature) what he or she wants to be done to themselves or the bad that is done will return to the doer. The Church's theology and mission work continue to be informed by this concept, although it has been adapted into a Christian understanding that it is God with whom humanity shares the Earth. Furthermore, the spirit of these communities' cleansing rituals and sacrifices have been affirmed in Jesus Christ's sacrifice of himself to redeem the world and to show the way to a life of love and righteousness. But as humanity continues to turn its back against the Creator, the warning of *Inayan* is affirmed by Isaiah 24:4-6: 'The Earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languishes together with the Earth. The Earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws; violated the statutes; broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the Earth and its inhabitants suffer.'



**The Earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws**

communities, where commercial interests are pursuing extractive and development industries which strip trees from forests, mine the mountains, poison agricultural lands, and pollute rivers and lakes. Unfortunately, it is these communities and the majority of Filipinos who are suffering from the catastrophic effects of this, while those who are responsible for the harm are reaping tremendous economic benefits. Thus, the mission of the Church to safeguard the integrity of Creation and renew the life of the Earth has become urgent and of the utmost significance. The Church's work in denouncing these destructive practices is complemented by its work among communities for the pursuit of livelihoods and development measures. This helps people to cope with the destruction caused by others while at the same time upholding the sanctity of Creation.



The Philippines is a culturally diverse country and is home to an estimated 14-17million Indigenous Peoples who belong to 110 ethno-linguistic groups. *Lumad* persons is a collective term for a number of indigenous people groups located in the south of the Philippines and *Igorot* describes a number of people groups from the Cordillera mountains in the north of the Philippines.

## QUESTIONS

- What links can you see between this story and Study 1 in terms of how we value Creation?
- As Christians, how can we learn from other worldviews?
- How do we ensure that indigenous worldviews and voices are heard and not lost?
- Where in our own countries are there perspectives that are more “attuned with the Biblical command for humanity to care for and be stewards of Creation”? How do they influence our understanding?

## PSALM 19:1-6

- <sup>1</sup> The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
- <sup>2</sup> Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.
- <sup>3</sup> There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;
- <sup>4</sup> yet their voice goes out through all the Earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.  
In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
- <sup>5</sup> which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,  
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
- <sup>6</sup> Its rising is from the end of the heavens,  
and its circuit to the end of them;  
and nothing is hid from its heat.

## QUESTIONS

- The Psalmist paints an almost utopian picture of Creation. We know that in reality, human greed and sin have spoiled that. What is your perception of Creation before the Fall?
- When you compare this image of Creation to the story from the Philippines, how does that make you feel about the way we have damaged the Earth?

## CLOSING REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Pope Francis’s work *Laudato Si* helps us to see that we should be open to ideas and language that take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just like falling in love, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, Saint Francis would burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all Creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them ‘to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason’

## A PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH - LAUDATO SI (POPE FRANCIS)

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.  
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.  
Pour out upon us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.  
Fill us with peace, that we may live  
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.  
O God of the poor,  
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this Earth, so precious  
in your eyes.  
Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the Earth.  
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognise that we are profoundly united  
with every creature  
as we journey towards your infinite light.  
We thank you for being with us each day.  
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle  
for justice, love and peace.

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## ACT

This week focus on how much plastic you use. At least 8 million tons of plastic end up in our oceans each year. Marine wildlife is often entangled in plastic causing death and injuries. Fine yourself 20 pence for every plastic bottle, pot or bag you use this week.

## STUDY 3

# THE FALL

### GETTING STARTED

So far, we have looked at God's plan for Creation. With an appreciation of how the quality of our relationships affects the way we do business in our mostly capitalistic societies, what insights might we gain from the story of 'the Fall'? Where have we gone wrong? What links are there to be made between our rejection of the principles of God, our exploitation of other people and our misuse of the planet?

## A VIEW FROM THE DIOCESE OF BELIZE, CHURCH IN THE PROVINCE OF THE WEST INDIES

By the Rt Rev'd Philip Wright, Bishop of Belize



Darmine and Kenton have been friends since childhood. They grew up attending St John's Cathedral in Belize City and were active in the youth ministry there as teenagers.

Over the past fifteen years, both young men have been engaged in the tourism industry. Darmine started his tour company, Five Star Excursions and Adventure, offering activities such as cave tubing and ziplining. Kenton started working with a food delivery company in the town of San Pedro, one of Belize's prominent tourist destinations, but later worked as a tour guide and snorkelling instructor. About ten years ago, the two childhood friends joined forces. Their joint operation did quite well.

The tourism sector has been severely hit by Covid-19. Within weeks, Darmine and Kenton found

themselves without a regular income and had to survive on their limited savings and the government's relief programme. They soon discovered how easily the smaller operators like themselves could be squeezed out of having equitable access to the kinds of resources that could help them recover in time. Larger investors and companies were able to forge alliances with select groups, effectively discouraging potential collaborations amongst the smaller operators. The two young men have now ventured into another business involving household food orders and deliveries.

When asked about lessons learned, Darmine and Kenton point to things like having faith in God, the need to be humble, the wisdom of frugality and the value of family.



## QUESTIONS

- What have been your experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic and how do they compare to those of Darmine and Kenton in the story?
- How can you personally relate to the lessons Darmine and Kenton say they have learned as a result of the pandemic?

## MALACHI 3:6-12

- <sup>6</sup> 'I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.
- <sup>7</sup> Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,' says the Lord Almighty.  
'But you ask, 'How are we to return?'
- <sup>8</sup> 'Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.  
'But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'  
'In tithes and offerings.
- <sup>9</sup> You are under a curse - your whole nation - because you are robbing me.
- <sup>10</sup> Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.
- <sup>11</sup> I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,' says the Lord Almighty.
- <sup>12</sup> 'Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,' says the Lord Almighty.

## QUESTIONS

- In what ways are we 'robbing God' when we do not care for God's Creation?
- What blessing do we have today that we do not have 'room enough to store'? How have we taken these blessings for granted?
- How has Christian thinking about 'dominion' contributed to destruction of relationship between God, people and the Earth?
- What has the Covid-19 pandemic taught us about the relationship between God, people and the Earth?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, guide us in the ordering of our lives and in our relationship with you, with each other, and with nature. May our relationships be built on trust, honesty, integrity, respect and love. Help us to seek Your perfect will in all things and, when we have rightly discerned it, grant us the courage to perform it to Your honour and glory. May we always act in the best interests of others as well as ourselves - seeking the common good in all we undertake. Let our efforts at securing justice and peace in our homes, churches and communities take the value of each and every one of your children created in your image and likeness seriously.

We make our requests in the name of your Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

## ACT

This week look at how you use water. Take steps to reduce your water consumption. Buy a water butt. Turn the tap off while brushing your teeth. Time your shower and then reduce the time you spend in the shower by half. Run the short cycle on your dishwasher and always make sure it is full.

For each action you take put £1 in your Lent Box or jar. ■

## STUDY 4

# SALVATION

### GETTING STARTED

We are moving into the New Testament. Christians believe that God gives us a new hope even when all seems lost. A hope not only for ourselves but for the whole of Creation.

“Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are Anger and Courage; Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.” (St Augustine of Hippo) All is not lost: ‘For God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Romans 5:8).

## A VIEW FROM MOZAMBIQUE

By the Rt Rev'd Carlos Matsinhe, Bishop of Lebombo

Mozambique's geographical location in the south-eastern part of Africa makes this country very vulnerable to the disasters directly caused by global climate change. In the last 2 decades, the country has been damaged by long severe droughts in the central and southern region, devastating cyclones and almost yearly flooding - especially in the central and northern regions. These claim many lives every year, and completely stifle any possibility of significant economic growth. In 2019, Cyclone Idai severely disrupted the lives of over four million people. To this day, many of them have not been able to reconstruct their damaged houses. Many social structures were destroyed, leaving the people more miserable than before. Poverty and hunger have become chronic despite the resilience of the hard-working rural population. Add political conflict, terrorism and corruption to the disruption caused by the climate and ecological crisis and the future for Mozambique looks gloomy, even though the country is resource rich.

In keeping with the Anglican Communion's fifth mark of mission, the Dioceses of Lebombo, Niassa and Nampula are actively addressing the climate and ecological crisis. They involve their members on reformation projects, providing education about resilience, participating in crisis response and working in partnership on climate change advocacy with other national institutions. One small example of the church's work is that all confirmation candidates must plant trees as part of their sacrament. Several youth groups are involved in pollution reduction and tree planting.

We are sure that global measures and policies to address climate injustice will restore the integrity of Creation and enable survival, better living and bring the planet into its full potential as a place blessed by God for all Creation. The powers of the world must stop their greed and irresponsible devastation of natural resources to save the future of the planet for all.



**The powers of the world must stop their greed and irresponsible devastation of natural resources to save the future of the planet for all**





## QUESTIONS

- The Anglican Church in Mozambique is responding in practical ways to the climate and ecological crisis. In what ways is your church dealing with it?
- The fifth Mark of Mission is 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of Creation and renew and sustain the life of the Earth'. In what ways does your church prioritise this?
- The Church of England has an environment programme. How much of this are you familiar with? Could you spend time discovering more about it and implementing suggestions?

For more information, please go to: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change>

## ROMANS 8:18-30

- <sup>18</sup> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.
- <sup>19</sup> For the Creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.
- <sup>20</sup> For the Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope
- <sup>21</sup> that the Creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.
- <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole of Creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.
- <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.
- <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?
- <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.
- <sup>26</sup> In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.
- <sup>27</sup> And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.
- <sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
- <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.
- <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

## QUESTIONS

- In what ways can we see Creation 'groaning as in childbirth' in the current ecological and climate crisis?
- 'For in this hope we are saved.' What is our hope and how can we achieve it individually and as part of a church community?
- How can we be part of a church that is a living example of equity and inclusion, and a powerful advocate for justice and sharing?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Our climate is changing, and we are changing it. We confess our carbon footprints, our failure to consider the consequences of our actions, our slowness to react. We are sorry for all the times we knew the right thing to do but chose convenience instead.

Your Earth is exploited, and we are complicit in its exploitation. Species are lost, soil erodes, fish stocks decline, resources dwindle. We confess that many of us have taken too much, and not considered the needs of future generations.

We have become consumers. We have turned a blind eye to greed. We confess our hunger for more, and our failure to appreciate what we already have. We live in a time of unparalleled luxury, and we are sorry that we have not been more grateful.

The poor are left behind, even in this age of plenty. Human rights are pushed aside for profit. Wealth accumulates for the rich while the poorest still do not have what they need. We confess our apathy to injustice, and our haste in judging others.

This is not who you made us to be. We have not been good caretakers of your garden Earth. We have not loved our neighbours. Forgive us, creator God.

Forgive us. Renew us. Inspire us.

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## ACT

Give up your car for a week. Instead walk, cycle or take public transport. If this means that getting to places takes a little bit longer use that time to reflect on what you have learnt over the past 6 weeks.

Put the cost of the petrol you have saved into your Lent Box. ■

## STUDY 5

# RESTORATION

### GETTING STARTED

Through salvation we believe all of Creation is restored to new life. God calls us to play our part in the restoration of God's Creation.

### A VIEW FROM THE CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA

The Church of South India (CSI) is recognised as a leading force on ecological action in India. Part of the reason for this is its Green Schools programme, through which the CSI instils in children and young

people the Godly value of caring for the environment. The Green Schools programme has received commendations from the World Council of Churches and the United Nations Environment and Development Forum.



This school has taught me how to save electricity, how to save water, how to plant trees and how to develop the ecology."

Hamani, a student at one of the Green Schools in India.

*'Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.'*

Proverbs 22:6 (NRSV)



School pupils take the lead in ensuring their schools are environmentally friendly. Children conduct 'green audits' of their schools, assessing their performance in areas such as air quality and waste management. They then make recommendations based on their findings, and the schools make adjustments where necessary. Each school involved in the programme appoints 60 of its pupils to look after ecological issues.

India's government has recognised Green Schools as a flagship

programme. As a result of this, the CSI's Department of Ecological Concerns was asked to work with the government's Department of the Environment to produce a curriculum for use in schools.

The CSI aims to implement the programme in all its 1,000 schools – not just for the pupils but their teachers too. Schoolchildren on the programme have become champions for the environment. Through them, the message of caring for Creation is reaching not only their schools and homes, but spreading further, influencing their neighbourhoods and wider communities. And the programme is now crossing continents; in 2021, 10 of the schools that are part of Green Schools in India will be twinned with 10 schools in the Diocese of Oxford, UK.

Alongside Green Schools, the CSI has created a wide range of environmental resources, including the books *Green Stories for Sunday School Children* and *The Green God of the Bible*, which was published in September 2020.

'At Sunday School, children should be trained in eco-spirituality, so that they can lead their lives from an ecological perspective,' says D Ratnakara Sadananda, former General Secretary of the CSI Synod.



**At Sunday School, children should be trained in eco-spirituality, so that they can lead their lives from an ecological perspective**



## QUESTIONS

- Why is it important to get children to start thinking from an early age about how they can take better care for Creation in their everyday lives?
- Because of the success of Green Schools, both the Indian government and the United Nations Environment and Development Forum now consult with the Church of South India on environmental issues. Can you think of any areas where your church could work together with governmental bodies for the common good?
- The CSI has published a book called *The Green God of the Bible*. Which Bible stories do you feel best illustrate God's care and concern for the environment?
- Some of the schools involved in Green Schools in India are now being twinned with schools in Oxford. What ideas can you think of to encourage young people in your church to build relationships with young people in other parts of the world?

## LUKE 2: 41-52

- <sup>41</sup> Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.
- <sup>42</sup> And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.
- <sup>43</sup> When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.
- <sup>44</sup> Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends.
- <sup>45</sup> When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.
- <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.
- <sup>47</sup> And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.
- <sup>48</sup> When his parents saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."
- <sup>49</sup> He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"
- <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he said to them.
- <sup>51</sup> Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.
- <sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

## QUESTIONS

- The 'prophetic voice of the Church' can often be heard loudest and clearest through its young people. In what ways does your church listen to the voices of its young people? And how can we work more effectively as an intergenerational community?
- Jesus in the temple reminds us of the wisdom and leadership of young people. How does your community encourage young leadership?
- Ecological justice is a priority for many young people. What does this mean for the mission of the church?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Father of everlasting compassion  
 you see your children growing up  
 in an uncertain and confusing world:  
 show them the path of life  
 enable them to triumph over failure and frustration  
 to hold fast their faith in you  
 and to keep alive their joy in your Creation;  
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Church of the Province of Southern Africa*

## ACT

This week encourage the children and young people in your church involved. Organise a sponsored litter pick.

Ask everyone to get into small groups and arrange a location and time to pick litter. Ask everyone to collect sponsorship for the number of bags collected.

For resources and support with your litter pick visit

[www.uspg.org.uk/forsuchatime](http://www.uspg.org.uk/forsuchatime) ■

## STUDY 6

# RECREATION

### GETTING STARTED

What would a radical expression of God's new Creation look like beyond our imagination? How can we enlarge our vision and creativity to glimpse what God may have in store? How can churches around the world help us in this?

### A VIEW FROM THE ASIAN RURAL INSTITUTE IN JAPAN

By the Rev'd Jonathan McCurley

Through its nine-month training programme, the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) lives out a 'three loves' theology in its community. This lifestyle is based in practical Christianity lived in a rural context, first advocated by the Rev'd Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig of

Denmark and brought to Japan by the Rev'd Toyohiko Kagawa. In loving God, loving one another, and loving the soil - the three loves - we seek to realise God's coming heavenly kingdom; a re-Creation of the life that God has envisioned for us.



We invite rural leaders and volunteers with servant hearts from Asia, Africa, Europe, the Pacific and the Americas to rural Japan and, alongside an international staff, we train in ways of re-Creation. We face our differences as persons with different cultures, worldviews, beliefs and experiences. In diversity, we learn how to serve and love one another daily.

Daily 'Foodlife' work is the foundation to this lifestyle. The word foodlife was coined by the Rev'd Dr Toshihiro Takami as a reminder that food and life are inseparable. Growing in and harvesting from the soil, we do more than just produce food. We re-create our own lives. From continuously working the soil, sowing seeds, caring for livestock, and communal harvesting, to meals shared at a common table, the entire process is one of nourishment for the body and the soul.

As we gather to share the fruits of one another's labour, we remember and have our eyes opened to God's work that brings life out of Creation and, through the community, to

one another. As we work the soil, as we train participants, and as we welcome visitors, we see God at work transforming each of us and Creation itself, to the image of Jesus Christ.

This work is not only about joy, for as the world suffers in the midst of disease and conflict, we also suffer. We face daily difficulties with one another, with the soil and with understanding how God is working in the world. This is nothing new. St Paul reminds us that our hardships are only an echo of the groaning that Creation experiences as it waits for redemption, for re-Creation. This is our hope and goal, that as we groan along with Creation, God will transform us and the world into a new Creation.

That groaning continues. After our time together, each year volunteers and rural leaders return to their homes to practice what they experienced, and the remaining community members begin to prepare again for a new community, a new year and a new manifestation of God's Kingdom.



**the entire process is one of nourishment for the body and the soul**



## QUESTIONS

- The Asian Rural Institute gives a model for 're-Creation' in community. In what ways are we or our churches agents of 're-Creation'?
- "We face our differences as persons with different cultures, worldviews, beliefs and experiences. In diversity, we learn how to serve and love one another daily." In what ways is celebrating diversity an important part of renewing our minds?
- Re-read the line "This work is not only about joy, for as the world suffers in the midst of disease and conflict, we also suffer." Share your different responses to this.

## BIBLE

### REVELATION 21:1-7

- 1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new Earth; for the first heaven and the first Earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.
- 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
- 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them;
- 4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'
- 5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also, he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'
- 6 Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.'
- 7 Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

## QUESTIONS

- The Bible passage gives us a vision of a 'transformed' Earth, restored to its original, God-centred glory. What kind of world do we want to see post Covid-19?
- What has been the most significant influence on your thinking during of this course?
- Name three things, in addition to the actions that you have taken throughout this course, that you commit to doing after completing this study course either as an individual or as part of a church family?

## CLOSING PRAYER

God our creator, as individuals and groups, may we come together in solidarity to think and act for the future, keeping sincere eyes on Christ. As you work inside of us and in Creation, may we be alert to the moving of the Holy Spirit, in order to live in ways to sustain life in the future. Amen.

*Paraphrased from the article 'Questioning the Culture of Gluttony', written by the Rev'd Dr Toshihiro Takami in 1987, Taken from Eudoo Journal Vol 3, 2019, Asian Rural Institute, Nasushiobara, Japan.*

## ACT

Make this week a meat-free week. Reducing meat consumption even by a little can have an impact on the environment. It also gives you a chance to live more simply and source your food locally. Commit to not eating meat this week. Put the money you save in your Lent Box.

If you are already vegetarian or vegan commit to only eating vegetables grown in the UK so that you can reduce air miles.

Put 20p in your Lent jar for every type of vegetable you eat from the UK. ■

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Climate change** is the long-term shift in average weather patterns across the world. Since the mid-1800s, humans have contributed to the release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the air.

This causes global temperatures to rise, resulting in long-term changes to the climate.

**Climate crisis:** A situation of imminent environmental catastrophe brought about by climate change.

Language matters and there is criticism that using language of 'climate change' does not reflect the urgency or gravity of the matter and therefore means that people fail to act.

**Climate justice** is one component of ecological justice. It acknowledges that those who are least responsible for causing climate change are most vulnerable to the impacts of it (both geographically and generationally).

It makes sure that climate change is not restricted to the fields of natural science or politics but is seen as a personal and ethical matter, examining issues such as equity, human rights, collective rights and the historic responsibility for climate change.

**Common but differentiated responsibility** is a principle that acknowledges that whilst all states have a responsibility for addressing climate change, their responsibility differs according to their current and historic contributions to greenhouse gas emissions and their social and economic capacity to address the impacts of climate change.

It became a legal part of the UN framework in 1992.

**Ecological crisis** occurs when changes to the environment in which a species lives threatens its continued survival.

The current global ecological crisis has resulted from human beings living unsustainably and includes a number of issues including (but not limited to) pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss and species extinction, soil erosion, deforestation and the generation of toxic waste.

Overcoming the ecological crisis will require radical changes in the way humans relate to each other and the Earth.

**Ecological justice** is where humanity lives within natural limits and in connected relation to all of Creation.

Ecological justice includes all components of social justice (gender justice, racial justice, economic justice etc) with the goal of economic activity to produce enough to meet the needs of Creation rather than seeking endless growth which is impossible on a finite planet.

**Kairos moment:** 'Kairos' comes from the ancient Greek and means an appointed time or opportune moment.

**Paris Agreement:** This was adopted in 2015 and is the latest global agreement to combat climate change and to accelerate and intensify the actions and investments needed for a sustainable low carbon future.

Countries agree to keep global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

**Sustainability:** According to the Brundtland Report (1987), sustainable development is 'development that meet the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

**Tipping points** are reached when impacts of the climate crisis become unstoppable, pushing parts of the Earth's system into abrupt or irreversible change.

Potential tipping points include the loss of ice sheets, the loss of forests and other natural stores of carbon, and changes in ocean circulation.

**Intersectional environmentalism** is the understanding that the injustices happening to the Earth and people are intrinsically linked. Social issues such as racial injustice, gender discrimination, rural/urban divides and material poverty all shape (and are shaped by) ecological injustice.

It follows that we must consider these issues together; a demand for ecological justice needs to also be a demand for social justice. ■





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We may contact you by post and telephone. If you do not wish to hear from us, or have a preferred contact method, simply get in touch with us at [info@uspg.org.uk](mailto:info@uspg.org.uk)

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**We live in a broken and unequal world. This cries out for words and actions that express solidarity and show God's love. Will you join with churches across the world in their mission of transforming lives through education, health care and justice for all?**

Pray for the world church – you can receive a quarterly prayer diary, or you can read it online at [www.uspg.org.uk/pray](http://www.uspg.org.uk/pray)

Be inspired by a USPG speaker – to book a speaker to come to your church email [info@uspg.org.uk](mailto:info@uspg.org.uk) or call 020 7921 2200

Use our Bible study courses – we have a range of resources for you to use in your church. You can download or order them here [www.uspg.org.uk/resources](http://www.uspg.org.uk/resources)

Fundraise for USPG – There are many ways you and your church can get involved with fundraising. We can provide you with Gift Aid envelopes, collection boxes and other resources. If you want to take on a challenge we can support you with fundraising ideas, help you make the most of your just giving page and so much more. If you want to get involved further please visit: <https://www.uspg.org.uk/fundraise>



# FIVE MARKS OF MISSION

Adopted by the Anglican Consultative Council in 1990, the Five Marks of Mission embracing a wide understanding of mission across the Anglican Communion incorporating evangelistic, educational, pastoral, justice and environmental strands:

- 1 TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM.**
- 2 TO TEACH, BAPTISE AND NURTURE NEW BELIEVERS.**
- 3 TO RESPOND TO HUMAN NEED BY LOVING SERVICE.**
- 4 TO SEEK TO TRANSFORM UNJUST STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY, TO CHALLENGE VIOLENCE OF EVERY KIND AND TO PURSUE PEACE AND RECONCILIATION.**
- 5 TO STRIVE TO SAFEGUARD THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION AND SUSTAIN AND RENEW THE LIFE OF THE EARTH.**

USPG is the Anglican mission agency that partners churches and communities worldwide in God's mission to enliven faith, strengthen relationships, unlock potential and champion justice.

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