

## Churches Together in Westminster Newsletter June 2017

In Westminster, the gospel call to love our neighbours becomes ever more insistent as refugees and others without settled homes are drawn to our borough. Many church communities respond with compassion and generosity to those arriving on our doorstep. And yet, the more we ask the question 'Who is my neighbour?' the more the circles of inclusion ripple outward, and the more we have to take seriously the impact of our actions on our neighbours far away. Pope Francis, in his 2015 encyclical 'Laudato si' underlined this by addressing his letter to all the people of the world – not just Catholics, not just Christians – and calling for all people to hear the cry of the suffering earth. Laudato si has been called 'a wake-up call to the whole of humanity to understand and respond to the destruction that we are causing to the environment and to other people.'

Concurrently, almost all countries signed up to the COP21 agreement to reduce their national carbon emissions in December 2015. The UK has set statutory national obligations, to cut carbon by 42% by 2020, and 80% by 2050. This is an enormous challenge. We are all effectively being asked to almost halve our energy use by 2020, and reduce it by 80% by 2050. How can churches do this and still keep warm and light, open and welcoming? And how can churches bear witness to 'our common origin, our mutual belonging, and a future to be shared with everyone'? (Laudato si).

Help is at hand! If you are of an Anglican persuasion, you have just come to the end of an ambitious, seven year action plan, 'Church and Earth', and much awareness and action are underway. The ongoing 'Shrinking the Footprint' campaign is integral to this, and provides support for churches aiming to save carbon (and money!), starting with auditing how much energy is actually used. 480 Anglican churches and associated buildings in London alone can make a real difference.

And then, for all of us, there is Eco Church, a wide-ranging ecumenical project led by Christian conservation charity A Rocha UK in partnership with others. The Eco Church vision is to create a vast network of churches as local centres of creation care in the community – shining beacons of hope for a brighter environmental future. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, endorsed Eco Church at its launch in St Paul's Cathedral last year, welcoming the new scheme as part of a 'tectonic shift' in Christian thinking, through which environmental concerns will embed more deeply in church culture. Eco Church takes the form of an online questionnaire with lots of associated resources, and encourages churches to work towards bronze, silver and gold eco awards.

As Churches Together in Westminster, we can support each other in a borough-wide Eco-Church project. Two dates for your diary to help your community's next steps on this journey are:

**Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> October:** a joint Eco Church – Shrinking the Footprint conference at St James's Piccadilly

**Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> January:** The Churches Together AGM will be eco-themed and include input from a range of organisations supporting environmental action in church communities.