

*God and the Climate Emergency: Faith Communities
and Environmental Stewardship*

Via Zoom

Wednesday 14 July 2021

12.00 – 13.15

Present

1. Adrian Allabarton
2. Ainsley Griffiths, Church in Wales
3. Alan Lansdown
4. Altaf Hussain MS for South Wales West, Welsh Conservative Party
5. Carol Wardman, Church in Wales
6. Christine Abbas, Baha'i community
7. Colin Harris, Cardiff Watch
8. Colin Heyman, Jewish community
9. Curtis Shea, Darren Millar's office
10. Darren Millar MS for Clwyd West, Welsh Conservative Party (Chair)
11. David Brownnutt
12. David Emery, Salvation Army
13. Gareth Edwards, Christian Institute
14. Gavin Smith, Senior Chaplain for Wales, British Army
15. Gethin Rhys, Cytûn
16. Jane Dodds MS for Mid and West Wales, Welsh Liberal Democrats
17. Jason Askew, United Reformed Church
18. Jim Stewart (Secretary and note-taker)
19. Julia Edwards, Climate Change Champion, Church in Wales
20. Katy McColgan, Interfaith Council for Wales
21. Lee Gonzalez, Researcher, Office of Joel James MS
22. Eluned Morgan MS for Mid and West Wales, Welsh Labour
23. Mantriraja Dasa, Tŷ Krishna Cymru
24. Mari McNeill, Christian Aid (speaker)
25. Mavis Harris, Cardiff Watch
26. Mike Hedges MS for Swansea East, Welsh Labour and Co-operative Party (Vice-Chair)
27. Molly Conrad, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
28. Nathan Munday
29. Peredur Owen Griffiths AS for South Wales East, Plaid Cymru
30. Peter Harrison, Welsh Brigade, British Army
31. Rebecca Evans MS for Gower, Welsh Labour
32. Rhys ab Owen AS for South Wales Central, Plaid Cymru
33. Russell George MS for Montgomeryshire, Welsh Conservative Party
34. Ryland Doyle
35. Sam Rowlands MS for North Wales, Welsh Conservative Party
36. Sasha Perriam, Cytûn
37. Sian Rees, Evangelical Alliance

Apologies:

1. Alaa Khundakji, Muslim Council of Wales
2. Bishop June Osbourne, Church in Wales
3. Heather Payne
4. Llyr Gruffydd AS for North Wales, Plaid Cymru
5. Sarah Jones, Church in Wales
6. Simon Walkling, Free Church Council of Wales

Minutes:

1. Darren welcomed everyone to the meeting. The Cross-Party Group on Faith had recently been re-registered and this was its first meeting of the 6th Senedd. Darren gave an overview of the group's history, having been established in March 2008 at the time of the launch of Gweini's Faith in Wales report. The purpose of the group remains the same – to highlight the positive contribution of faith groups to communities in Wales.
2. Business:
 - a. Darren Millar MS was re-elected as Chair, nominated by Mike Hedges MS and seconded by Sam Rowlands MS
 - b. Mike Hedges was elected as vice-chair, nominated by Sam Rowlands and seconded by Darren Millar
 - c. Jim Stewart was re-elected as Secretary, nominated by Darren Millar and seconded by Mike Hedges
7. Darren welcomed the newly-elected MSs in attendance and said how pleased he was that so many had a strong personal faith of their own. He referred to Altaf Hussain, Jane Dodds, Sam Rowlands, Rhys ab Owen and Peredur Owen Griffiths, all of whom were present at the meeting.
8. Darren paid tribute to Rheinallt Thomas, who had been a valued and committed member of the group during his three-year tenure as President of the Free Church Council of Wales. He made many excellent contributions to the discussions in the group meetings, including those on the Welsh government proposals on the new curriculum which were discussed last year. Rheinallt's replacement is Rev Simon Walkling who will now be attending group meetings.
9. Darren introduced Mari McNeill, Head of Wales for Christian Aid, who spoke on on **God and the climate emergency: Faith communities and environmental stewardship**.
10. After Mari's presentation, a discussion time was held, chaired by Darren, in which the following contributions were made by attendees, relating to the presentation and the topic:
 - a. **Carol Wardman, Church in Wales**. The Welsh Government's Wales and Africa programme along with Climate.Cymru, which they are responsible for running, works closely with the Church in Wales through the latter's Global Issues Forum and its environmental group CHASE. There are lots of other organisations involved as well.
 - b. **Mari McNeill, Christian Aid**. Part of Christian Aid's role with its sponsoring churches is to help bring the churches' global connections together. As an example of churches taking action on climate change, in September the Presbyterian Church in Wales will be

launching a denominational appeal focused primarily on the climate emergency, Part of that will be raising funds for Christian Aid partners who are working on the frontline of the climate emergency in places like Kenya, Haiti and Honduras while also taking action locally as churches.

Christian Aid has several members of staff who work locally with churches and they can help if MSs come across churches in their constituencies that want to get involved in action on climate change, whether locally or globally (if so, contact Mari on MMcNeill@christian-aid.org).

- c. **Gethin Rhys, Cytûn.** [Climate Sunday](#) is the umbrella that virtually all of the Christian churches and many organisations such as CAFOD, World Vision and Christian Aid are involved with. It's a short-term project in the run-up to COP 26. There are many resources in Welsh and English, encouraging churches to worship, to make local commitments and to speak up in the run-up to COP.
- d. **Molly Conrad, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.** The Catholic Church has 22 dioceses in England and Wales and at the moment 20 have signed up to a community collaborative effort to enable all dioceses in England and Wales to go carbon-neutral. 20 have signed up to an energy switch so that these 20 dioceses, including the three within Wales, are powering their offices and parishes through renewable resources – part of the church's work to de-carbonise.

The Catholic communities also have a pilot project at the moment called Guardians of Creation, centred around finding a template that will work for all of the dioceses to de-carbonise fully. This was inspired by Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical [Laudato Si](#). The Catholic Church is currently gathering case studies and Molly hopes to be able to share examples to the group in the future.

- e. **Mantriraja Dasa, Tŷ Krishna Cymru.** The International Society of Krishna Consciousness, which Ty Krishna Cymru is a part of (or the Hare Krishna movement) encourages its branches to operate independently but the UK national organisation has launched an initiative for each centre to have an eco-champion to improve climate engagement. It's a five-tiered template consisting of Food, energy, waste management, water and education outreach or culture. One of their projects, Food for Life, delivers free plant-based meals to people. Food for Life Global is the largest plant-based food relief operation in the world. Our diet and lifestyle have a climate impact.
- f. **Katy McColgan, Interfaith Council of Wales.** Interfaith Scotland has been very involved in climate change and are producing a statement which Katy will share with the group once it has been finalised to see if it is something that individual faith groups in Wales and the Interfaith Council of Wales can sign up to. This topic is one that the Interfaith Council of Wales could focus on in a future meeting.
- g. **Mari McNeill, Christian Aid.** [Make COP Count](#) is an informal UK-wide group of representatives from different faith communities working together on advocacy, hospitality and action ahead of COP26. Wales can be more involved in this.

- h. **Sian Rees, Evangelical Alliance (EA)**. EA UK, specifically EA in Scotland, is working on a partnership piece with Tearfund and Christian Aid and there will be a free online event on September 7th. EA's younger demographic in particular is very much into creation care and climate justice issues although there has been denial of climate change from some evangelical Christians. As an Alliance of Evangelicals across the UK, however, EA is very proactive in lobbying on climate change issues and is creating theological and devotional reflections. These will be coming out in the coming months on the EA website, www.eauk.org.
- i. **Katy McColgan, Interfaith Council for Wales**. Gethin Rhys shared an excellent presentation on the environment which can be found [here](#).
- j. **Gareth Edwards** (speaking from a personal perspective). Gareth represents around 60 evangelical churches in Wales on trips to North East India, working in association with the Independent Church of India. Part of this involves supporting an Indian church initiative, the Rural Women's Upliftment Society, which enables rural communities in their development issues in the light of the challenges of climate change.
- k. **Mike Hedges MS**. There are challenges regarding how to engage older people in our churches and faith communities in the issue of climate change – they are not denying it but they are often not interested.
- l. **Dave Brownnutt**. Laura-Lee Lovering is an environmental scientist who has been working in the Peruvian part of the Amazonian jungle. She has been appointed by the Baptist Mission Society as a Creation Stewardship Coordinator to work with them in all their activities around the world to learn from them and share the lessons with BMSs supporters in the UK. She will encourage supporters to see what they can do to be more environmentally friendly and to see environmental care as a Christian responsibility. She will be based in Peru and her email address is llovering@bmsworldmission.org.
- m. **Darren Millar MS**. There was a statement in the Senedd this week on trees and hedges (see [here](#)). The Welsh Government has set some very ambitious targets for tree planting across Wales over the next 5 years. Darren wonders to what extent faith communities could be engaged in this
- n. **Katy McColgan, Interfaith Council for Wales**. The Interfaith Council of Wales has committed to be involved in the [Queen's Green Canopy](#) which is for tree planting between October and March. There are trees available from the Woodland Trust but you have to be able to identify where you're going to plant them.
- o. **Christine Abbas, Baha'i Council of Wales**. We need to look at what the principles are that underly this problem. What does it mean to be a global citizen and a community builder? We need to look at poverty and the extremes of wealth – these are challenging and disturbing the natural order and progress of our planet. The inequality of men and women also has a part to play in this. Unity is important – we need to work together, whether we're people of faith or no faith.

- p. **Wynford Ellis Owen.** We need people’s cooperation in this. People feel that their voice has been ignored over the years and now we want their cooperation so something needs to change. We have an all-or-nothing, a black and white way of thinking which is our biggest problem – we catastrophise everything, we always have to have something to be upset about and complain about, we always have to have an enemy. The truth is always somewhere in the middle.
 - q. **Gavin Smith, Senior Chaplain for Wales in the British Army.** Principles of justice are at the heart of what we do – giving our fellow beings what they are worth. Justice and the work of the kingdom of God in terms of caring for God’s creation is actually doing God’s work and we need to understand that as the two are intrinsically linked.
 - r. **Mantriraja Dasa, Ty Krishna Cymru.** Economical development and the environment can seem to be at odds. Perpetual development is not sustainable. We need to work more on maintenance rather than growth.
 - s. **Mike Hedges MS.** Planting trees is something we can all do and it helps the environment in all sorts of ways.
 - t. **Mari McNeill, Christian Aid.** It all comes back to justice. And it’s a constant reminder to ourselves that it’s our faith that compels us to challenge the abuse of God’s creation and to insist on the intrinsic value and dignity of our brothers and sisters around the world
 - u. **Darren Millar MS.** Micah 6:8 in the Old Testament of the Bible says: *‘He has shown you, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.’* That is a good recipe for success and if we do that, we’ll see the bold action on climate change that we need to see.
11. Jim will email the group with details of the next meeting once they’ve been confirmed
12. The following actions were agreed by the group:
- A. Darren will write to Welsh Government:
 - a. Stressing that Wales’ faith communities are a very willing partner in tackling climate change and would like to engage with Welsh Government on:
 - i. Tree planting
 - ii. The Wales and Africa programme and any other international action that’s being taken in countries that are bearing the brunt of climate change
 - b. Encouraging them to be bold in the commitments that they make at COP 26 when they participate in that.
 - B. To consider holding an event in the Senedd in order to exchange some of the ideas shared in today’s meeting and to promote some of the actions that are being taken at a local level by individual faith communities and organisations. Once restrictions have lifted, this could be something that the Cross-Party Group on Faith could organise in the Senedd to showcase some of the fabulous work that’s going on.

13. Darren closed the meeting.