

REPORT

'A Future for All ... Implementing the Christian imperative to care for our World' conference

On Saturday 14 July 100 Quakers, Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Methodists, URC and others came together for the first Eco Church ecumenical environmental conference held at the Priory Rooms, the Quaker owned conference centre in Birmingham. *'A Future for All ... Implementing the Christian imperative to care for our World'* was organised by the Central England Quaker Low Carbon Commitment forum and the Birmingham Anglican Climate Action group. The main speakers were Bishop David Atkinson, scientist, author theologian, Paul Parker and Rich Bee, Engagement Director at A Rocha UK but it was also a day of worship, workshops and conversations, learning from each other and discovering the action we can take, individually and together.

We were first welcomed by Claire Bowman, the Central England Quaker ecumenical coordinator and Anne Hollinghurst, Bishop of Aston. In her introduction Bishop Anne emphasised how addressing climate change was moving from debate to action and that faith had a vital role to play in achieving the changes of hearts and minds needed. Bishop Anne reminded us the Anglican Communion's fifth mark of Mission is 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth'.

David Atkinson, a research scientist at Kings College London for six years before training as an Anglican priest, first explained how the relatively stable climate that most of human civilisation has known is now likely to suffer considerable disruption. Unlike our fathers and grandfathers, we now know that burning fossil fuels is putting a warming blanket around the earth. The resulting rise in temperature damages the wellbeing of humanity and all other creatures. The present generation now has the knowledge of the environmental costs that are associated with the huge benefits that have come from technology and industrialisation. David said that we have reached this point because we have lost the biblical 'triangle of relationship' between God, the earth and humanity. We have a view of Nature without reference to God and of human beings as the 'lords and masters' free to exploit Nature and dominate it to meet our needs and wants. We need to renew the Covenant that brings economy, ecology and equity together and shows up the illusion that human flourishing can be achieved by limitless consumption and industrial growth.

Paul Parker spoke about the injustices in the position has now been reached. As a relatively rich and privileged nation, Britain has benefited from fossil fuels and other commodities at the expense of others. We have a responsibility to do more than others to cut carbon and resource collective action. We need to be able to confront these truths and have faith that we can achieve change. To speak out for economic and social change, we need to make changes to our lives so that at the same time we can, with integrity, demand bold action from government, mobilise civil society and encourage grassroots pressure. Quakers are working with other Churches to show government that we, as people of faith, care about the outcome, we care about the detail and part of our job is to hold Government to account. It's easy to feel powerless, to sit back in despair and to pray for deliverance. For Quakers, though, prayer means action, remembering that through the eyes of someone from the global South we look powerful beyond measure. We have the voice, the money, the freedom of speech, the democratic structures and the access to government to make ourselves heard. And we must do so.

After coffee we split into three workshops: the A Rocha Eco Church project, worship and teaching and, thirdly, a lively and popular community and global engagement workshop sharing action and initiatives already being taken.

The lunch hour was an opportunity for conversation, network and enjoy food provided by the Priory Rooms as well as to visit the adjacent Peace Hub - Quaker Peace & Justice Centre and learn about its work from coordinator, Pete Doubtfire.

The afternoon included a contribution from Kamran Fazil about his environmental training workshops for Muslim Imams from Birmingham mosques. The Imam training started with identifying immediate local environmental issues – polluted rivers, rubbish on the streets – and worked through to how the Imams and local mosques could make a difference. Kamran explained how encouraged he had been by Imams' response to the workshop and the actions that they had committed to making.

We then split into workshops around five main themes in the Eco Church project: Buildings and Land, Engaging with politicians led by the Sheffield based Hope for the Future, Fossil fuel divestment, interfaith experiences led by Footsteps - Faiths for a Low Carbon Future and a popular life styles and living sustainability workshop.

Finally, Rich Bee, from A Rocha summed up the day and we then closed with worship led by Claire Bowman and Bishop David Atkinson that was a blend of the Anglican and Quaker traditions.

After the conference one of the Quakers present commented 'we thought it was excellent with a mix of inspiring speakers, practical action and call to urgency'