

## **Voices of the Climate Crisis 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

On May 25<sup>th</sup> 2021, Irish Council of Churches partnered with Christian Aid in an online event. The objective was to support people in church leadership, both lay and ordained, with information and resources, so that they are better equipped to encourage and promote engagement on climate justice. Nearly seventy people joined in.

Three excellent speakers spoke on the topic “Voices of the Climate Crisis”.

**Bob Kikuyu**, Global Advisor for Theology and Church Partnerships, supports the Policy and Advocacy instruments of Christian Aid. He liaises with churches and faith based organisations in helping them to articulate and carry out their social development programmes in Kenya. Bob remarked how COP can be a distant concept to many, especially in poor countries. However, there is room for individuals and churches to participate. Resilience can be built through ensuring that projects and actions are accessible and reachable. Small Steps make a cumulative difference. For example, one project that Bob spoke about was planting a tree for every baptism. What if trees were planted for all celebrations? Boys get a cow at Rite of Passage. What if a girl had a tree planted at time of her birth? Bob spoke of simplicity and spirituality. He reminded us that Jesus used natural concepts in His teachings, speaking of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, and used parables like the Sower and the Seed.

**Julius Mbatia** works for Pan African Climate Justice Alliance as a Programme Assistant where he serves as the Climate Finance Focal Point and implements a resilience pastoralism programme in areas of East Africa. Julius spoke about the devastating impacts of Climate Change especially in the Global South. Farming and agriculture are very vulnerable and Julius made reference to the negative impact on agriculture in Kenya. Excess consumption has led to big environmental problems. Churches and congregations have immense mobilisation capacity and could influence their people to adapt responsible and meaningful consumption. The transformative capacity of moral leadership cannot be discounted.

**Rebekah Wilson** is part of an organisation known as Just Love. The job of Just Love is to motivate Christian students to have a passion for justice and to do something about it. Rebekah divided her talk under four headings.

**Present** or now: Climate Change is extremely urgent. With deaths, air pollution, heat waves, forest fires, floods and an increase in hunger Climate Change is an emergency that must be tackled now.

**People:** Though some issues may appear more immediate than Climate Change it cannot be overlooked that Climate Change is interlinked with the problems old people, small farmers, the poor and many other vulnerable categories of people suffer.

**Privilege:** Rebekah remarked that people with time, money, education and are generally comfortable have the resources and the ability to care. Privilege is not harmful in itself. It is how we use privilege that makes a difference. Students are encouraged to start with small actions such as avoiding fast fashion, and eating low on the food chain. As Bob also articulated small steps make a cumulative difference.

**Pursuit of God:** In many cases people of privilege use more than their fair share of God's resources. It is good to act with responsibility through loving our neighbours near and far.

The discussion within the break-out rooms will be collated and made available at a later date. After the break-out rooms there were questions for the panel and some revealed concerns. Flower farms in Kenya, with their associated land acquisition from Kenyan people by foreign companies, their enormous use of water and serious water pollution from pesticides was a concern. It would appear that the only benefit to the Kenyan people are the jobs, though the situation of land and farming and GDP from farming have all being impacted upon by Climate Change.

Another question asked was do we need a shift in our spiritual view, away from Genesis 1.27, to the knowledge that humanity, rather than being at the centre of the universe, is part of a divine whole. We are part of nature rather than apart from nature.

The very informative morning closed with the River Blessing.

Useful websites

<https://www.climatestewards.org/resources/360carbon/> web-based tool which enables churches to measure their carbon footprint from different activities energy, travel, food, waste, water and other expenditure.

<https://www.climatesunday.org/> The Climate Sunday initiative is calling on all local churches across Great Britain & Ireland to hold a climate-focused service on any Sunday before COP26 (November 2021).