

How can I encourage my community to Care for Creation in their daily lives?



Faced with questions of care for creation, it's easy to feel daunted, exhausted, judged or confused. Maybe cynical too.

- There are so many things we are told are bad for the environment. This information changes rapidly and is sometimes conflicting.
- There are things we've done for years - we may ask 'why is this an issue all of a sudden'?
- So much of the information seems to be telling us to stop doing the things that give us joy. Or to only do them in ways we can't afford.

Firstly, if you're cynical or confused - that's entirely understandable. This is an emotive topic, which one way or another, makes big demands on us. Not least - the demand that we critique the way we live and recognise our (global and individual) over-use of the world's resources.

But then - faith does make demands of us. Jesus promises life in all its fullness, for all of creation, together. He calls us now, to love God and neighbour with every fibre of our being. While we *are* challenged to consider our care for the world - within that challenge is profound promise. In living out of love for the world, we will find wholeness and fullness of life. It is in this outward focussed life that we become the beautiful beings God made and calls us to be.

What follows below are recommendations for sources of good information, and practical suggestions for ways to live as Earth-Keepers rather than Earth-Consumers.

This is unequivocally NOT written as a list of 'sins' or demands that everyone do all of this. Neither is it exhaustive.

The list was written in response to a request from one parish, for non-preachy, practical suggestions for ways to change our way of life - Achievable adjustments for the daunted, confused, and hopefully even the cynical - and further information for those already open to this way of thinking. Rather than 'Do's and Don'ts', the list is written in terms of 'Did you know? And 'Could you?'. The aim is to be invitational, rather than blaming. Informing, encouraging questioning, and posing some achievable challenges.

Inform yourself

The earth comes from God, is entrusted to our care, and is the site of our relationship with God. So we need to understand it, and our impact on it. What that impact is, is complex and nuanced. How deep we go is up to us - we don't need a PhD in earth sciences to care for the world. But some knowledge is a good thing - especially when there's still a lot of misinformation out there.

For some well balanced, informed and accessible information on climate change, the impact of human action, and worthwhile actions for change, I recommend this channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@JustHaveaThink>

It focusses on the scientific evidence, the arguments - information and misinformation, politics, economics and technological innovations being made in response to climate change. It's very open and evaluative and gets

to the bottom of much of the complexity of asking ‘what’s the right, and worthwhile thing to do?’

Similarly this channel

<https://www.youtube.com/@SabineHossenfelder>

Explores (amongst other things) the urgency of the matter, and examines the value of a variety of responses to it. For example - neither descending into panic in the face of an environmental apocalypse, nor cheerfully assuming we can engineer our way out of the whole thing. If your community want good scientific debate and information, this is a good place to go.

Other than that - when looking for information on climate change, obviously, always check your sources. Ask what the agenda of a contributor is, and how credible their evidence. Avoid conspiracy theorists, *and* question where the funding for research is coming from. Look for sources with no vested interest in either keeping you buying the old technology, *or* buying into the new.

Practical suggestions

What follows below is an attempt at a positive, achievable approach - or first steps towards lifestyle changes for the sake of caring for God’s beautiful and struggling creation.

I have gathered some sources of information, in key areas of creation care (mapping the EcoChurch main areas) followed by the questions ‘Did you know....’ and ‘Could you.....’

Creation Care at a Household level

Churches have the Eco-Church awards, looking at every area of church life from the point of view of our impact on and care of the environment. Did you know that there is also a toolkit for households to do this, with associated awards:

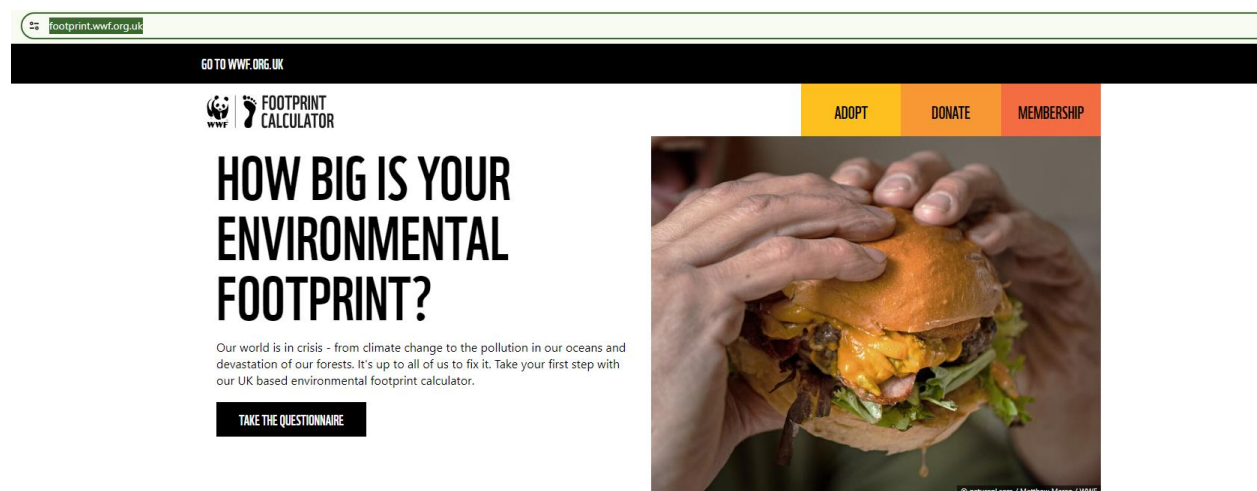
<https://creationcare.org.uk/about/>

Churches can sign up, then encourage households to sign up under their church's mantle - then you can celebrate each other's progress and journey together in creation care as disciples. And have a bit of healthy competition and accountability too.

Some churches in our diocese have begun with the leadership team signing up, working on reducing their environmental impact, and sharing their learning, and struggles, in church. Communities are encouraged to sign up, ask questions, and share experiences and recommendations. Thus creation care has become woven into the community's life and discipleship.

Creationcare.org is a specifically Christian toolkit. There are also many tools to calculate your household's carbon footprint, such as this one from the WWF

<https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/>



footprint.wwf.org.uk

GO TO WWF.ORG.UK

ADOPT DONATE MEMBERSHIP

HOW BIG IS YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT?

Our world is in crisis - from climate change to the pollution in our oceans and devastation of our forests. It's up to all of us to fix it. Take your first step with our UK based environmental footprint calculator.

TAKE THE QUESTIONNAIRE

© naturepl.com / Matthew Moran / WWF

Food

A note for farmers

We recognise that farming inherently involves caring for the earth from which you grow everyone's food; and that making a living from farming is not easy, with the unpredictable seasons caused by climate change.

This is even more true for British farmers, given that in Britain, we spend a significantly smaller proportion of our incomes on food than the rest of the world.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/12/this-map-shows-how-much-each-country-spends-on-food/>

First and foremost as God's community within our national community, we need to focus on responsible eating - buying food grown here, as responsibly as we can afford, with the lowest food miles and as little waste as possible. Supporting British farming *is* being environmentally responsible.

It *is* also true that we need to eat less red meat and milk, for the health of ourselves and our planet. We *all* need to adapt to alter the course of climate change. This document is not intended to in any way blame farmers or ignore your contribution to creation care.

Information on food and creation care:

Foods with the biggest carbon footprints

<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/food>

Food miles and their impact

<https://www.carbonbrief.org/food-miles-have-larger-climate-impact-than-thought-study-suggests/>

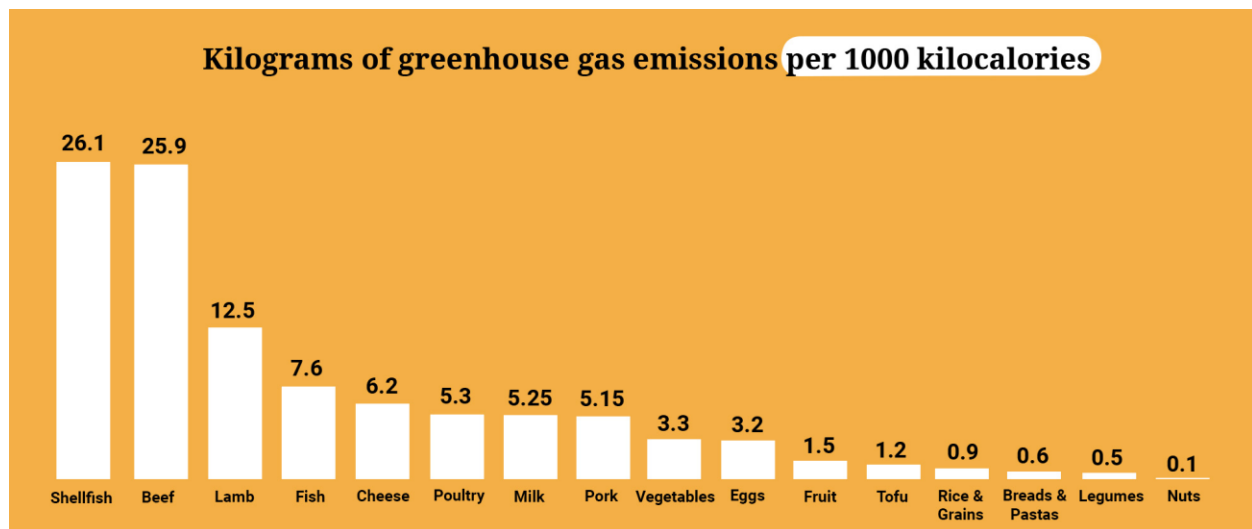
Contribution of the developed world to carbon footprint of global food industries

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-022-00531-w>

Did you know:

The foods whose production releases the most greenhouse gases are red meat (beef, then lamb) and shellfish (especially prawns).

Plant proteins - Nuts, peas and beans give far, far, more calories per kilo of greenhouse gas produced by their production.



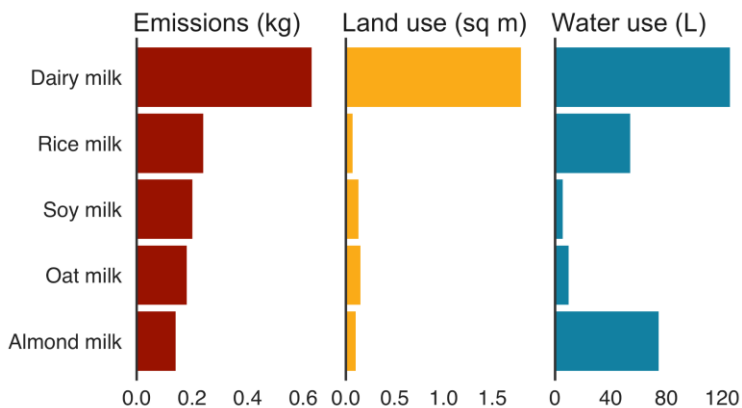
(Image source - UN site cited above).

Could you:

- Give up prawns? For most people they are a minor part of their diet. Could you give them up altogether?
- Replace beef with any other meat, in your diet? Shift to beef being a treat for special occasions?
- Have a plant based milk on your cereal in the morning, rather than cow's milk?

Which milk should I choose?

Environmental impact of one glass (200ml) of different milks



Source: Poore & Nemecek (2018), Science. Additional calculations, J. Poore

- Eat vegetarian all day, once a week? If that's a big step - start with your main meal, once a week.
- If you already have a meat free day - how many more meals or days could you do? Could you have a vegan day?

Seasonality

If we shift towards a plant-based (or less red-meat heavy) diet, we must at the same time, consider how far our fruits and vegetables have travelled. Are we eating 'summer' foods all year round?

Did you know:

- High income nations represent only about 12.5% of the world's population, they are responsible for 52% of international food miles and 46% of the associated emissions.
- About 19% of carbon emissions from our food supply (from field to fork) comes from transport.
- Transport of fruit and vegetables makes up 36% of this; fruit and vegetables are transported further, more often, than meat, dairy and grains.
- **Greenhouse gas emissions from getting our fruit and vegetables to us, are about twice that emitted by growing them.**
- Food produced out of season, when not imported, is grown indoors. While growing under glass can have benefits in reducing input and waste, and using less land, it also consumes a lot of energy and water.

<https://blog.ecoation.com/why-greenhouse-grown-food-is-better-than-field-grown-food>

- Eating seasonally is *usually* going to be a better idea. If we eat the foods that grow in our part of the world, at the time of year they are naturally available, their production and transport will likely have had a smaller carbon footprint.

Did you know: What proportion of food is imported to the UK?

Of the total food and animal feed consumed in the UK in 2020, 46% was imported. The majority of this came from Europe. Of the total consumed, 20% came from outside Europe.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021-theme-2-uk-food-supply-sources>

Imported food is a fact of life, living on a densely populated island in the Northern hemisphere. However, given that transport makes up such a vast proportion of the carbon footprint of fruit and vegetables, we can reduce our carbon footprint significantly by buying British, *and* avoiding foods grown further away.

This is a good website with a lot of well researched articles. This one explores the comparative footprints of the most carbon-heavy fruits

<https://impactful.ninja/fruits-with-the-highest-carbon-footprint/#>

It's worth noting that it's not UK based so some of the analyses can be challenged in terms of the distance particular fruits have travelled (for example most oranges in the UK are imported from Spain or North Africa, not Brazil. But it is a useful article nonetheless.

Could you:

- Develop a habit of checking the origin of your food, and stick to those grown in the UK or Europe?
- If seasonality is new to you, could you pick a food group or a food type and eat it seasonally? Eating seasonally *is* eating locally - it's the stuff that grows in this country at this time of year.

For example - if you regularly buy soft fruit - strawberries & raspberries, try comparing the flavour in winter to summer - could you keep them as a summer treat, so that they are UK grown?

- Would you give up blueberries? - these use a lot of water and pesticides and are usually imported from America.
- If you buy avocados regularly, could you reduce that to only eating European ones?

These actions will reduce your carbon footprint, and impact on habitat loss from farming in developing nations.

This practice will have the added bonus of becoming more aware of the seasons, more appreciative of God's provision, and eating fresher food that has been ripened by the sun and watered by the rain - and will generally have a better flavour.

Waste

Did you know?:

In the UK, in 2021/2 we threw away 95kg of food, equivalent to £250, per person over the year. This was at home. Of all the food waste nationally, two thirds comes from households and one third from business/producers.

The main reasons we throw food away are that we have bought or cooked more than we needed

<https://www.wrap.ngo/resources/report/household-food-and-drink-waste-united-kingdom-2021-22>

We are blessed with easy access to food, year round. While too many people live in food poverty, and at the same time obesity rates are rising, we are also wasting what we have. Our relationship with food, as a society, is breaking down. How can we make more reverent use of God's provision?

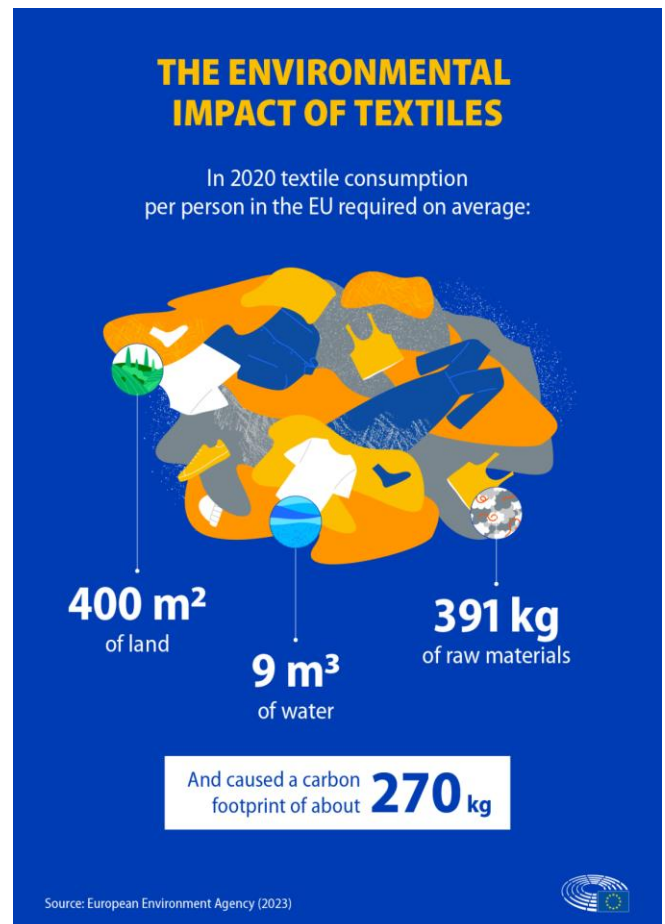
Could you:

- Keep and use more leftovers
- Use a meal planner to avoid over-shopping
- Use a site like <https://www.supercook.com/> to pick recipes that use up what you have in the fridge and cupboard, rather than going shopping just yet?
- Keep a rubbish diary - record what you throw away for a week. What change could you make to waste less?

Clothing

Did you know:

- The textile industry is a major contributor to climate change, pollution, and habitat loss.
- Because they are not foodstuffs, the controls on pesticides and herbicides on plant fibres are fewer. These result in water and soil pollution, soil loss, species loss and ecosystem breakdown.
- The majority of clothes in the Western world are made with synthetic fibres, made from petrochemicals, which break down in the wash and end up as microplastics in the ocean.
- The majority of discarded clothes in the UK end up in landfill - where, unless they are wool or plant fibres, they do not rot.



- The average person in the UK owns 30 items of clothing that they rarely wear. That is, about 25% of their wardrobe.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20201208STO93327/the-impact-of-textile-production-and-waste-on-the-environment-infographics>

It's not all bad news:

- In the UK the average length of time that we keep an item of clothing for has increased by about a year, since 2013.
- Secondhand and vintage clothing is becoming more popular, and we're likely to keep these items longer than those we have bought new.

<https://www.wrap.ngo/media-centre/press-releases/nations-wardrobes-hold-16-billion-items-unworn-clothes-people-open-new>

Could you:

- Keep a record of how often you buy new items of clothing - can you go longer? If you're a family, have a competition on this.
- Commit to wearing things out - or downgrading them to wear for informal uses, rather than discarding?
- Find places to take clothes to be recycled, rather than putting them in the bin.
- If you compost - pure cotton, wool and other plant and animal fibres will biodegrade fairly quickly. Do check the labels though.
- Try to buy natural fibres wherever possible. While wool has a large carbon footprint, it does rot down completely in the soil and doesn't contribute to microplastic pollution. Properly cared for, it often lasts longer than synthetic equivalents.
- Look in charity shops or on preloved sites for your items before looking for new ones.

- Hold a clothing swap with friends or a community group.

Flowers and houseplants

Flowers are a joy - signs of life, bursts of colour. However, like the clothing industry, controls on chemicals are significantly less than for food. Then there's the carbon footprint of shipping fresh flowers in refrigerated lorries.

Could you: If you're in the habit of buying flowers frequently, could you change to British ones, or houseplants instead?

Pets

Pets are possibly the most controversial thing to discuss in relation to how human choices negatively impact the environment. Pets are part of the family. They are good for our mental health. Loving them is loving creation.

Carnivorous pets - dogs and cats, however, are a significant contributor to our household's environmental impact, because meat has such a huge carbon footprint (from producing the meat animals' feed, and the greenhouse gases they emit).

Could you:

- If you're thinking of getting a new pet, could you choose a herbivore?
- Limit yourself to one carnivorous pet?
- If you're planning on buying from a breeder, could you rehome a rescue instead, rather than adding to the pet population?

- Could you share a pet with a neighbour? Many busy people would appreciate a friend for their dog, to give it daytime walks or weekend breaks. There are many online communities that do just this:

<https://shareyourpet.org/>

www.borrowmydoggy.com

And as an added benefit, sharers find friends and community with fellow animal lovers.

The scientific evidence is not yet conclusive on whether it's safe to feed a dog a vegetarian diet <https://www.bva.co.uk/news-and-blog/blog-article/is-it-safe-to-feed-my-dog-a-plant-based-diet-hold-the-greens-only-meals-why-the-jury-is-still-out-on-vegan-dog-diets>

But there are other, admittedly small, adjustments you can make, such as vegetable treats for dogs and natural fibre toys or upcycled bedding.

Transport

Did you know:

- Transport (of all kinds) makes up a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-and-environment-statistics-2023/transport-and-environment-statistics-2023>

- While this is falling, as electric vehicles come in, and renewable energy replaces fossil fuels, it's still the largest single contributor to the UK's greenhouse gas emissions.
- We can reduce this in the products we choose to buy, as explored above, and in our own use of transport.

- For some good, in depth analysis of the latest developments in electric cars, and the claims made about them, this channel is a good one: <https://www.youtube.com/@davetakesiton>
- To compare running costs of electric with ICE cars, try this handy tool <https://www.drivesmart.co.uk/fuelanalysercars.aspx>

Could you:

- Walk more of your journeys? Can you plan your day to allow the time? Embrace a slower pace of life - and champion it to others?
- Lift share? If attending an event could you offer or ask for a lift?

Community organised car pools and lift shares are becoming more common, such as these:

<https://www.blablacar.co.uk/carpool>

<https://liftshare.com/uk>

- Is there public transport?
- Combine trips? Reduce the number of journeys wherever possible, by doing several jobs in one journey?
- Webchat? If it's a work or church meeting - could it happen by zoom/teams or other web chat?
- Air travel remains the most impactful form of transport in Carbon footprint terms. How frequently do you fly, how far? Could you reduce this?
- When it comes to replacing a car, will you look at the viability of an electric one? They are rapidly becoming more affordable, they are markedly cheaper to run and maintain, and with the shift to sustainable power, nationally, they will radically reduce our emissions from personal transport.

Investments

If you have savings, own a business, or are treasurer for a church or other organisation, how far do you know what your money is being invested in?

Some investment funds are described as Ethical. This does not mean that all others are 'bad', but more that the Ethical ones have been measured against a range of ethical criteria. With growing awareness and critique of how the banks use our money, there are tools available to help you make informed decisions, that fit your values.

Here is a helpful article exploring this:

<https://www.unbiased.co.uk/discover/personal-finance/savings-investing/ethical-investing>

In short, you can measure investments against a range of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria - not simply which industries a fund invests in, but the overall impact of each company on many different measures.

While the point is not what we get out of it, current research does suggest that sustainable investment pays.

<https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/financial-services/articles/driving-value-creation-through-esg-practices.html>

And in the long term - this makes perfect sense. It's not a sound investment if it destroys the life it purports to fund.

More useful information on sustainable investment, and specifically, divesting in fossil fuels can be found at:

Just Money

<https://justmoney.org.uk/money-makes-change-hub/investing/>

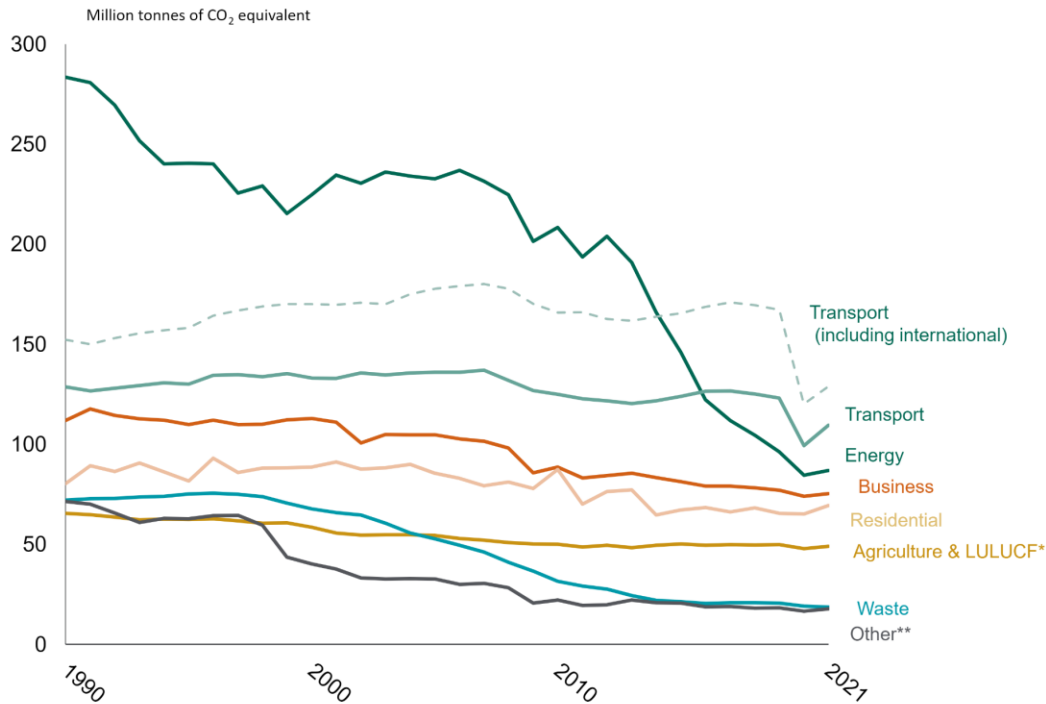
Operation Noah

<https://www.operationnoah.org/bright-now-campaign/church-divestment/>

We cannot recommend individual investments, but a search under 'Ethical Investment' or 'ESG investment' will bring you a variety of choices. A registered IFA will also be able to discuss your priorities and guide you to the funds that match your values. We encourage you to consider avoiding industries that are particularly polluting and carbon-heavy, such as fossil fuels and petrochemicals.

Energy

Until recently, utilities were the UK's largest consumer of carbon. By 2015, they had swapped places with transport, to become the second largest.



Data from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-and-environment-statistics-2023/transport-and-environment-statistics-2023>

Could you:

- If you have a say in which utility company and tariff you are on, would you consider swapping to a green tariff? The higher the demand for sustainable energy, the more rapid the switchover will be. Lets fuel the switch.

Are there low-cost, high impact, fuel efficiency and consumption savings that you could make?

Such as:

- Turning down the heating by a degree
- Adding a layer of clothing rather than boosting the heating
- Blocking drafts
- Ventilating to dry condensation out (and remembering to close windows again).
- Adding further insulation in your loft.
- Tucking curtains behind radiators, so that heat does not go out the window. Or switching to thermal blinds.
- If you mainly use one room during the day - heating just that room?
- Could you investigate the costs and benefits of changing your heating system from gas/oil solid fuel, to an electric one?

Of course, this will be a major cost. Is it one that you can plan to make though, when the time comes? Could you look in to the efficiency savings, and calculate whether you could do it sooner, rather than later?

There are many more suggestions online. This site is dedicated to assessing the efficiency of your home, suggesting improvements, and pointing you to grants:

<https://energyadvicenortheast.co.uk/>

Fairtrade

Jesus came, that the world should have life, and life in abundance. In this global economy, it is easy to lose sight of the impact of our consumption on the places they come from.

How far is the contents of our shopping basket, bringing fullness of life, or its opposite, for our neighbours in the countries that produce those goods?

Fairtrade is about just that - trade which gives a fair price for the work and cost of producing the goods. At its best it considers the wider cost - the environmental impact and long term sustainability of those industries.

Fair trade goods are now widely available in our supermarkets. They are often more expensive. This is a matter of discipleship - as Christians, we should consider how our consumption affects our neighbour, and supports the sustainable use of the earth's resources. Can we justify paying less? To what extent are we supporting industries that are life-giving and not supporting industries that hurt people and the environment? Are these goods necessities?

There is a lot of good information on the impacts of buying different types of fairtrade goods here

<https://www.fairtrade.net/product>

Recycling

Did you know:

In England, about 44% of domestic waste is sorted in recycling plants and sent for recycling. To look at it another way, each of us discards about 7 times our body weight per year, to landfill.

<https://www.recyclingbins.co.uk/recycling-facts>

While the provision of domestic recycling has improved massively in the past 30 years, we are still lagging behind our neighbours - Germany recycles 60-70%.

Recycling is devolved to local authorities. You can find out how your local authority performs in relation to its neighbours here:

<https://laportal.wrap.org.uk/>

What you carefully sort and send for recycling does not necessarily end up being made into new materials. Worse, it is often burnt or exported to other countries where it may not be recycled but end up harming the environment, including people.

<https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/plastic-recycling-export-incineration/>

This should not put us off recycling however. The earth's resources are finite and precious. Individuals, local authorities, governments, and manufacturers all need to change our practices.

Could you:

- Make a rubbish audit. Record what you recycle, and send to landfill by weight, number of items, or both, for a week?
- Write to your MP and Councillors, challenging them on your Local Authority's and the nation's recycling record?

- Write to the manufacturers of products that you use, that it is hard to find a plastic-free or recyclable packaged version of, and ask them what they are doing to change this?
- Consider if there are other forms of recycling you could do. Small electrical items, for example, are easy to put in the bin - but their impact can be horrific if they contain circuitry and batteries. Could you collect them and take them to the tip, or a business such as B&Q, next time you're there?
- Could you organise with neighbours or your church, to make collecting things not collected at the kerbside, viable. There are collection boxes and bags that you can get free or purchase, to collect items like batteries and medicine blister packs, then send for recycling.

<https://www.terracycle.com/>

- Seek out alternatives to the most packaging-heavy items in your bin. These are no longer rare and specialist things only available online or in health food shops. Supermarkets stock re-usably package items, such as refillable toiletries and cleaning products. Switching to loose fruit and vegetables would reduce the unrecyclable plastic film that your household generates. Taking a cardboard box for your shopping rather than using a carrier bag is both cost and plastic-free.

Reuse

- Not buying new, and repurposing old items is even better than recycling - it takes little or no energy, or materials. It used to be called thrift, or just good housekeeping. Now it is known as upcycling or re-use. Whatever you call it, it makes good sense all round.
- While many modern homes lack as much storage space as larger ones, could you use your space to store food packaging (eg margarine tubs) for re-use, instead of throwing them away *and* buying purpose made ones?

- Rather than buying flowerpots for the garden, could you re-use an existing container? Ingenuity can be fun. Yoghurt pots with holes made in them, or toilet rolls, can be used for young plants. Corrugated cardboard can be used as a weed suppressant on the veg beds (and will rot down eventually). Discarded household ceramics can be used as planters.
- Could you form a habit of always carrying a shopping bag, a re-usable coffee cup, or water bottle?

Sharing and rehoming

Another way to reduce the consumption of goods and materials, is to share them or give them away. The added benefit is that this builds community - which is at the core of being church, too.

Could you:

- Form a co-op, whether formally as a local movement, or informally with friends and neighbours. Could you share items like garden tools, cleaning or sewing machines?
- Hold a clothing shuffle or hire scheme.
- Set up a school uniform exchange
- Hold or find preloved sales for baby goods, which often have very short use-lives.

<https://theoctopusclub.com/>

<https://www.mum2mummarket.co.uk/>

Mending

- Do you sew, have woodworking or electrical skills, are you good with glue?
- Could you offer those skills to others, informally, to extend the life of goods and reduce waste?
- Could you teach your skill to others?
- Could you join or hold a community repair event?
<https://www.repaircafe.org/en/>

Campaigning and voting

We can do a lot to change society by changing as individuals - every little does help. Especially if we tell others.

But also - society needs to change in the way we organise, prioritise, and use the earth's resources. This is a matter for politicians and business.

So how we vote, and how we hold our representatives to account is part of our individual contribution.

- Do you vote? Do you encourage others to?
- Do you know where your local candidates stand on environmental matters? Have you questioned them on how far their parties' commitments go?
- Could you organise a hustings in your community, and question them on this - and other matters of ethics?
- How high a priority is active care of our environment, and the move towards a sustainable society, in your voting choices?

As was said at the beginning, this is not an exhaustive list. If there are other areas of life you would like information or ideas on - or that you can share information on - do get in touch.

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