

Introductory presentation

Hello, my name is Emily and I am so grateful for your invitation to speak to you today. I am part of two wonderful communities based in the UK - the Young Christian Climate Network, or, YCCN, and a project called Get to Glasgow - both have placed a pilgrimage to COP26 at the heart of their reaching out to others with a Christian message of creation care and climate justice. I am speaking today mostly with my YCCN hat on, but will be sharing some experiences from my engagement with other projects as well as my engagement with the study of theology. For YCCN the focus of our message is on the area of Climate finance and we have three important statements that underpin our relay pilgrimage, especially aimed at the UK:

1. no country should go into debt because of climate change
2. we walk as an act of solidarity and faith
3. decisions for our future are being made on our doorstep

Although targets have been set in previous years, we are concerned that appropriate action is not being taken in order to bring about transition and change for a sustainable future and a sustainable now. We are concerned for those countries who are facing the force of climate change but do not have the finance to adjust and invest in their future - our future - and who should not be facing these transitions alone and falling into greater debt because of them. We want to hold our government accountable to delivering and exceeding the promised \$100bn in climate finance. We want to raise awareness of COP26, so as to draw attention to the world-shaping events that are taking place in our lifetime and on our doorstep, events that enable Christians the

opportunity to rise up and stand alongside our brothers and sisters and bring the message of the gospel in our time. YCCN has aimed to promote these messages through a relay pilgrimage starting from Cornwall in the South and throughout the country to finish at Glasgow for COP26 in November.

My role in YCCN is to welcome new members and as such, I get to hear the reasons for people's wanting to be a part of the community. This has been really insightful to my understanding of young people's engagement with their faith and the environment, many commenting that they had no idea that there was any existing community that brought the Christian faith and Climate justice together, and jumped at the opportunity to connect with others who shared these passions. I think that YCCN appeals to young people in particular because its message is one of community and connection and not one of independent and individual challenge. I think that there is an issue of inclusion and diversity when it comes to the 'climate justice culture' in the UK, as well as in the Church of England. We have placed the blame of the climate crisis into the hands of consumers and therefore made it our individual efforts to fix. It is like attending to the consequence of the problem, rather than addressing the root causes. Though I agree that our consumption habits are a huge fault and need altering, our framing of theology and understanding of creation care in terms of our identity as consumers, has meant that we have made the new ideal, the new future and vision of environmental care an alternative market to which only some can afford. And when someone cannot afford to shop and consume in a way that we have learnt to, we harbour judgment towards them and continue to place the blame on the most vulnerable. We do not want climate justice to be something that only some people

can be involved in, but an integral and accessible part of the Christian faith. The pursuit of climate justice according to Christianity cannot be the means of bringing greater division to the body of Christ, but must work towards unity and inclusion.

Our empowerment is not found in isolation or self-sufficiency, but in community, nor is it found as Christians in consuming, but rather in serving and standing alongside. Lifestyle choices may flow out of our fellowship, but the starting point is connection and belonging. One of the main messages of YCCN is the value of people, and the need to protect them against the desire for financial gain and profit. I have grown in understanding that the climate crisis is a crisis of broken relationships but there has been a lack of space where we theologically reflect on how our society and our Church has reached a place of favouring individuality over community, and what our theology of human relationships looks like, in light of Christ. The title of this conference focuses on reconciliation with creation, and a fundamental part of this has to be a reconciliation with our brothers and sisters. The climate crisis cannot continue to be seen in a fragmented and disconnected way, but as an issue that highlights the interconnectivity of many areas of life, people and the world.

Pilgrimage can be a form of resistance and protest to the norms and values of cultures that overlook the value of particular human, animal or other created life. It can be a place at the margins, a place of belonging in contrast to the mainstream and dominant cultures that disregard. It can be understood as a journey towards healing, wholeness and humility, of walking alongside others and encountering them where they are. It is journey that promotes a transition by enabling people to face

the need for change and being able to adapt to this through attentiveness, prayer, reflection, connection and dependency.

In a recent article entitled, 'Burned out in a burning world', Padmini Gopal, a young climate advocate based in Ghana expressed the need for emotional rest as part of the sustainable solution to the climate crisis - rest, we profess as Christians, is the intended end of all creation and heading to this end as a united body means that we safeguard and hold to account that wholeness and rest are not left behind in the pursuit of peace. We move towards rest, not death or burn out.

Thank you.