

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE POTR ECO CHURCH TEAM

I have been asked by the POTR Eco Church team to summarise the Winchester Diocese Eco Evening, held at Christ Church, Winchester, with speaker Ruth Valerio that I attended recently on behalf of the team.

Ruth Valerio was a founder member of 'A Rocha', which as an organisation combines hands-on practical conservation work with a deeply rooted biblical faith. As the Parish of the Resurrection we are currently working towards our 'A Rocha' Bronze Award as we endeavour to be more ecologically aware throughout the whole Parish. Ruth now works as Director of Global Advocacy and Influencing for Tearfund, which as an organisation works through the church on the ground to tackle the root causes of poverty, respond to disasters and see people's lives transformed. She lives with her family in the South of England and spoke extremely well. She started by saying that Environmental care should be part of every Christian's life because it tells us so very clearly in the bible. She highlighted 4 clear foundational points:

1. **God made this world and He loves His whole creation:** Gen1:31, Ps65:9, Job 38-39, Mathew 10:29, Heb 1:3, Col 1:16-17. He says it is 'very good' and Ruth talked about how God the creator and God the saviour go hand in hand. Concluding that we need to pray for a deeper heart for this world and for open eyes to see how we can look after it better than we are
2. **God has created us to look after all that he has made:** Gen 1:26-28, 2:15, Lev 25:1-5. She explained that God wants us to rule with service, justice, servanthood, stewardship and compassion
3. **God's creation has gone wrong because of us.** Gen 3, Deut 28, Amos 8. It is a direct result of human sin, injustice and oppression. Ruth gave examples of local climate crisis, for example when the poorer farming communities cut down trees for fuel but then the land dies for crop propagation because of soil erosion, and then also of global climate crisis due to the richer industrial communities and heavy industry. She spoke of species extinction and loss of biodiversity emphasising that each species bears the fingerprints of God. And finally, she spoke of the plastic crisis where ocean creatures are drowning in plastic, there are plastic granules in our food having come down the food chain and there are plastic fibres in the air that we are breathing in. Ruth talked about the poorer communities in the World that can't afford waste management, so it either builds up or is being burnt both resulting in higher incidence of disease. She stressed that both rich and poor are linked with the environment and as such, can't be separated. But that,
4. **God has a future for His whole creation:** Gen2:4, Ps19:1, Rom 1:20, Col 1:16, Rev 4, Isa 43:18-21, Rom 8:19-22, Eph 1:9-10, Rev 21-22. God has a plan for this World when Heaven and Earth come together.

So, using the foundations above, Ruth posed the question 'how do we engage those around us on this important matter?' Ruth said that as a church we should Teach, Give, Pray, Speak out and Live out our lives as an example. There are already some great things happening but there is always room for more. She expanded these ideas as follows;

Teach: This year's Lent Course entitled 'Saying Yes to Life' commissioned by The Archbishop of Canterbury as his official Lent book for 2020 covers how we can live life differently. 'As people made in the image of God, we are entrusted with the care of what God has made and also with sharing in

the joy and creativity of making a difference for good'. The teaching is suitable for adults, youth and children.

Give: Ruth explained that it was important both as individuals and as churches to invest money in the right places and that it was better to give in a regular fashion than as a one off, because organisations like Tearfund, Christian Aid and A Rocha could then plan their approach to situations. She stressed that as Christians we should be blessing others with what God has blessed us with.

Pray: We need to ask God to speak to us and show us how and what to pray for as individuals and within our churches. Ruth gave the example of the last Climate talks in Paris and explained that Faith communities came together to pray that the countries involved in the talks would have agreement. These groups prayed before and throughout the week of the talks and Praise God that for the first time, there was agreement on the main issues. Tearfund have resources to help 'pray for the climate' in advance and during this year's November climate talks in Glasgow.

Speak out: Big systems need to change so as Christians we have to speak out to companies and policies via governments, MPs and campaigns. For example Tearfund Action has produced 'This is a Rubbish Campaign Card' for individuals, churches and the big single use plastic producers such as Coca Cola, Nestle, PepsiCo and Unilever to think about how to reduce plastic waste.

Live it out: Ruth suggested some examples

Food: eat Fairtrade and local produce, change diet

Travel: cut down on flights, off set carbon, use 'responsible travel' companies

Energy: Switch to green energy suppliers, invest in solar panels

Waste: avoid single use plastics, use soap bars rather than bottles and alternative wrappers/containers for food. Remember to reduce, reuse and recycle

As part of working towards the Bronze 'A Rocha' award, the POTR Eco Church team have already been working with our Ministry Team to look at how as a Parish we can be more ecologically aware. For example, our Parish now promotes and uses Fairtrade products with a regular opportunity to buy them after church services. We have surveyed our churches, buildings and land to look at making them more energy efficient, thinking about the potential for cycle racks and to find ways of increasing biodiversity of flora and fauna. We have introduced a POTR Freecycle site and promoted different ways of recycling, such as alternative uses for old Christmas cards, in addition to the already established monthly markets and resurrection furniture shop. As part of 'teaching and praying', along with focussed services such as Harvest, there are monthly tips and prayer pointers on the POTR website and each of the four churches will have notice boards sign posting people where to get more information on reduce, reuse and recycle.

In conclusion, there are many good things that are happening in our Parish already and as a team, we are always looking for more volunteers and will endeavour to write regular updates in Sunrise to keep everyone informed about how we are working with our Ministry Team to become an even more ecologically aware Parish. So please pray for us, thank you. Julie Howe on behalf of the POTR Eco Church team

For further Information and Resources:

Ruth's talk can be found by following this link: <https://www.winchester.anglican.org/the-environment/>

'Saying Yes to life'. – By Ruth Valerio. commissioned by The Archbishop of Canterbury as his official Lent book for 2020. <https://www.london.anglican.org/event/2020/02/02/saying-yes-to-life/>

'L is for lifestyle' by Ruth Valerio (ISBN978-1-78359-996-7) eBook ISBN 978-1-78974-101-8

Tearfund see 'resource section' for prayers and action tearfund.org

Traidcraft for Fairtrade products www.traidcraft.co.uk

Parish Web Site for tips/pointers and to contact the Eco team: <http://www.potr-alton.co.uk>

For other Diocese events www.winchester.anglican.org

Advance notice for the 'Alton Eco Fayre' in the Public Gardens on 12 July 2020 where ACAN (Alton climate action & network), Alton repair café, ALFI (Alton local food initiative) eco produce and a refill station from the village green will be represented. events@alton.gov.uk