



Harrogate Deanery Synod 21st January 2025

St John's Church Hall, Vicarage Lane, Knaresborough,
HG5 9AE

GUEST SPEAKER:

Dr Stewart Davies, Chair of Bradford Sustainable Development Partnership. Chair of OPRL Ltd (which runs the UK labelling scheme for packaging recycling). Non-executive board member at the Environment Agency. Licensed Lay Minister at St Peter's Church, Harrogate.

Eco Church: Challenges of Transforming Systems

The Lay Chair warmly welcomed Stewart to the Synod. Stewart began his presentation by reminding members of the five areas of Eco Church:

- I. Worship and Teaching
- II. Buildings and Energy
- III. Land and Nature
- IV. Community and Global Engagement
- V. Lifestyle

This evening's synod will focus on **Community and Global Engagement** and **Lifestyle**.

Stewart showed a slide stating the goal of **Community and Global Engagement** is to ensure that 'Our church recognises the impact of the climate and nature crises and has a plan or strategy to take action **LOCALLY** and/or **NATIONALLY** and/or **GLOBALLY**'.

To achieve this goal, churches need to have conversations which build an understanding of the issues, locally, nationally and globally, by:

1. Raising awareness i.e. getting people on board through sustainability movements and initiatives; engaging with the local community; community clear ups; local conversation work
2. Taking action
3. Communicating

With regards to **Lifestyle**, the goal is to ensure that 'Our church has a strategy or plan to promote ethical and environmentally aware consumption patterns by individuals and households'.

To achieve this goal, churches and individuals need to play a role in educating and influencing church members and the wider community about the actions they can take and the influence they have.

Stewart pointed out that our purchasing habits, dress, diet and travel decisions are not the only means God gives us to act for his creation. How we use our time and 'voice' to campaign are as important as the choices we make about the shape and content of our daily lives.

Stewart explained that **Lifestyle** is about, 'Recognising that we can have an impact on the world through the choices available to us and our use of money and resources. We will strive to support our church family and wider community in bringing about positive change and care for God's Earth. We will seek to encourage our church community and beyond to live gently on the Earth and be prepared to challenge systemic injustice'.

Stewart then explained that there are four areas that need exploring if we are to faithfully respond to the climate and nature's crises:

1. Reality
2. Risk
3. Responsibility
4. Redemption

1. **What is the Reality?**

Stewart stated that as Christians we need to be passionate about **truth**; we must defend robust debate about the state of our planet and insist that it is grounded in reality and true facts.

Stewart showed several slides providing robust evidence of the increase in greenhouse gases, the increase in the concentration of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere and the global trends of increases in greenhouse gas emissions between 1850 and 2020. The data also provided evidence that greenhouse gas emissions increased faster during 2024 than the trend had predicted and there is now real concern that the increases in 2025 will be even more off-trend.

Further slides provided evidence of global temperature increases, and highlighted the part humans have played in affecting our planet's vital systems:

- Climate change
- Biosphere integrity and land system change
- Land system change
- Freshwater use
- Biogeochemical flows
- Ocean acidification
- Atmospheric aerosol loading
- Stratospheric ozone depletion
- Novel pollution

In concluding this first section on the Reality of the planet's environment, Stewart explained that for 12,000 years earth had been a stable, benign environment (The Holocene), but since 1950, major Earth System changes have become directly linked to changes largely related to the global economic system (The Anthropocene). This indicates that humanity has a new responsibility at a global level for the planet.

2. **What are the Risks?**

Stewart showed a slide from the World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey 2024 – 2025, a respected international survey which has been carried out annually for more than 20 years. The survey results ranked the global risks over the next 10 years in terms of their severity. They are:

- I. Extreme weather events
- II. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
- III. Critical change to Earth systems
- IV. Natural resources shortage
- V. Misinformation and disinformation
- VI. Adverse outcomes of AI technologies
- VII. Inequality
- VIII. Societal polarisation
- IX. Cyber espionage and warfare
- X. Pollution

The survey found this perception of the dominance of environmental risks over the next decade across all sectors: civil society, academia, government, business and international organisations.

Stewart highlighted that these risks are linked; they form a map of interconnections. One example of this is how the increase of extreme weather events is disrupting food supply and water resources essential to stable society, hence risking involuntary migration or displacement of populations, impacting health and adding to inequality and social polarisation.

A risk on top of all these risks is that the capabilities needed to transform systems to address global risks are compromised by the current state of chronic conflict, environmental tipping points, increasing specialisation, infrastructure lock-in and mis- and dis-information. More challenging still is the realisation that interactions between these tend to be reinforcing.

3. Who is Responsible?

Having talked about the reality and risks, Stewart showed several slides which considered where the responsibility lies e.g. with citizens/consumers, governments, businesses, financial sector, media/advertising, the economic political system.

Stewart made the point that as consumers our thinking and beliefs are influenced by media and advertising which is paid for by businesses. For example, ‘everyone needs a bit of winter sun’ has been carefully imbued in our culture, in the face of the known growing climate change impacts of air travel. He opined that whilst governments say they are committed to net zero emissions, they fear the loss of votes they believe would be the consequence if they were to mandate changes to consumer lifestyles. So, in the face of all that is known about the environmental reality and risk, western democracies are following the track of growing an economic system that is critically damaging the environment. Stewart stressed that as Christians it is imperative that we take personal responsibility for what we do as individuals, what we buy, how we vote, and also what we say, using our voices as consumers and citizens, seeking to influence the systems we live within.

4. What about Redemption?

There is still, to quote Jonathon Porritt’s book title, ‘Hope in Hell’! Published in 2020, this book argued that we had a decade to confront the climate emergency.

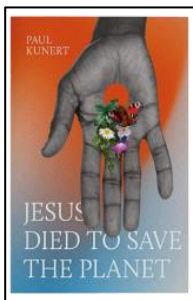
Transformation is needed in the systems that determine the impact of humanity on our planet and our voices, our micro-actions and our prayers make a difference. Stewart reminded us that Eco Church says, as a Church we need to have the conversations necessary to build an understanding of the issues, locally, nationally and globally.

He concluded with the question. How can our churches bring about conversations on ways to:

- I. Demonstrate commitment to Justice
- II. Be careful about Truth; challenge misinformation and insist that discussion is based on facts
- III. Face up to the Risks with courage
- IV. Hold people/organisations to account as citizens and consumers
- V. Choose a One-planet lifestyle: on a personal level work on reducing our carbon footprint and impact on biodiversity; putting micro-actions into practice.

The presentation was followed a **Question & Answer session**.

Jesus Died to Save the Planet¹ [Jesus Died to Save the Planet | LICC](#) Deborah urged members to read this book published in 2024. The book can be ordered in printed form or downloaded for free as a pdf. Jemima Parker had previously recommended this book at the November synod.



Conclusion The big take-away message from the evening is that fundamentally we need to reduce our consumption of materials and energy, becoming wise to the vested interest of corporates and financial organisations who encourage us to keep consuming because it maintains their profitability. Stewart challenged us to have an ‘eyes-wide open’ approach and to keep challenging politicians and business to address the climate and nature crises that face us all.

¹ Paul Kunert, *Jesus Died to Save the Planet* (London: The London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, 2024)