



PRESS RELEASE

Monday, 1 November 2021

## **Climate Sunday galvanises churches' commitment to action for start of COP26**

On Monday 1st November, at COP26, the Climate Sunday coalition of 31 Christian denominations and charities announced the final numbers of participants and commitments in its year of churches' action on climate change. Andy Atkins, chair of the coalition and CEO of A Rocha UK, announced that at least 2,200 churches had held a Climate Sunday and made commitments to continue their own action on climate change in the future. Leaders of participating denominations and charities gathered at the one day Climate Sunday exhibition to affirm their commitment to accelerated action on climate change and to press the UK government and other national leaders to put the world on a course to stay below 1.5 degrees of heating at this COP.

The Climate Sunday initiative motivated hundreds more churches to sign up to one of four pre-existing church greening schemes, taking the total number of participating churches past the 5,000 mark in the week before COP26. And at least 747 local church representatives have signed the *Time is Now* Declaration (joining a total of 192,230 signatory from across the public sector). This calls on the UK Government, in their role as chair of COP26, to be much more ambitious in seeking faster and deeper global emissions cuts, the delivery of long-promised finance to help poorer countries adapt to the climate disruption, and a green economic recovery from Covid.

**Andy Atkins, chair of the Climate Sunday coalition and CEO of A Rocha UK** said:

'This surge in Churches' action - across the UK, across the traditions, from small chapels to Cathedrals - demonstrates that local Christian communities are increasingly prepared to take bold action to address their own contribution to climate change. They now expect the UK government to lead boldly at COP26, and to get the UK's house in order soon after, whatever other nations will or won't commit to. In the critical decade



ahead, UK churches will be a major national community holding government to account on its climate responsibilities’.

Over the past year, the Climate Sunday initiative has encouraged churches to worship, act, and speak up on climate change. At their Climate Sunday service, congregations have been encouraged to deepen their understanding of the science of climate change, and the theology of action on it; to make a commitment to ongoing action in their own place of worship and community (such as getting involved with one of the available church ‘greening schemes’: *Eco Church (coordinated by A Rocha UK)*, *Live Simply (coordinated by CAFOD)*, *Eco Congregation Scotland* and *Eco Congregation Ireland*. And to speak up and use their democratic voice to urge the UK government to take much more adequate action by signing the *Time is Now* Declaration organised by the separate Climate Coalition.

**Bishop Graham Usher, bishop for the Environment for The Church of England** said: “Climate Sunday has inspired countless congregations to engage with the climate and biodiversity emergencies. I have seen people empowered to pray, to act, to campaign, and to make lasting changes to their own lives. Thank you for all behind this initiative that seeks to care for our planet and all of our global neighbours, many already impacted by climate change”.

**Richard Murray, chair of Eco-Congregation Scotland**, said “The Climate Sunday initiative demonstrated that we are tackling the climate emergency with urgency, leading by example in our churches. Christians across the nations are increasingly motivated and supported to care and act for God’s creation. Scotland's churches are delighted to welcome the world to COP26, online or in Glasgow. We all share this unique opportunity for transformational change, taking practical steps to change our own behaviour and calling on leaders at COP26 to agree global measures with lasting impact. Climate Sunday helped link this directly with our spiritual life, focussing local churches on the environment in worship, prayer and action.”



**Reverend Andrew Orr, Church of Ireland and chair of Eco-Congregation Ireland** said “Climate Sunday has really inspired churches of all denominations across Northern Ireland to get involved in the movement to tackle climate change. Many congregations in the province are working and praying for a successful outcome to the COP26 talks and calling on the government to take real and meaningful actions for our planet”

**Reverend Judith Morris, General Secretary of Baptist Union of Wales** said “We give thanks for the commitments made by churches to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and we pray that they will be honoured and multiplied extensively throughout the UK as we play our part in caring for creation. We ask God’s rich blessing on these critical COP26 meetings and pray that government leaders will be fearless in setting brave, bold and uncompromising targets to slow down climate change thereby ensuring a future for our planet and for our brothers and sisters of tomorrow.”

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**For images and interviews with spokespeople please contact:**

Tamsin Morris, Press Officer, Climate Sunday Coalition on 020 857 45935 ext: 9006 or 07931 961557 or email: [tamsin.morris@arocha.org](mailto:tamsin.morris@arocha.org)

**Notes to Editors:**

**Spokespeople available for interview in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland include:**

- Andy Atkins, Chair of Climate Sunday and CEO of A Rocha UK
- Bishop Olivia, Bishop of Reading, the Diocese of Oxford’s first female bishop
- Stephen Curran, Manager of Eco Congregation Scotland, Steering Committee for Climate Sunday
- Reverend Judith Morris, General Secretary of Baptist Union of Wales
- Reverend Andrew Orr, Church of Ireland representative and chair of Eco-Congregation Ireland
- Shermara Fletcher, Principal Officer for Pentecostal, Charismatic & Multi-cultural Relations, Churches Together in England

**1) Climate Sunday initiative**, organised by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is the UK’s broadest based Christian initiative on climate change in the run up to COP26.



- 'Climate Sunday' has been the broadest-based christian coalition for action on climate change in advance of COP26. . .
  - **2,200 churches from 31 denominations and Christian charities** call on the government to act on climate. The list was handed in to No.10 Downing Street on Monday 18 October
  - Over **747 churches** have signed the 'Time is Now' Declaration, joining 192,230 signatories across UK civil society, calling on the UK government to go further faster on climate action.
  - **5,029 churches** are involved in church greening schemes to reduce their environmental impact and so far 1,817 have achieved awards.
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- Climate Sunday has formal backing from CAFOD, Christian Aid, Tearfund, The Salvation Army, A Rocha UK, Operation Noah, Climate Stewards, Eco-Congregation Scotland, Eco-Congregation Ireland, Green Christian, the Church of England, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Baptist Union of Wales, the United Reformed Church, The Church of Scotland, Churches together in Wales, the Union of Welsh Independents, The Church in Wales, World Vision, The John Ray Initiative, USPG, The United Reformed Church, The Salvation Army, Joint Public Issues Team, CTBI, Christian Concern for One World, Church of Ireland, Young Christian Climate Network, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

## 2) Church Greening Schemes

The 'Greening schemes' are award based programmes which equip churches to take action on the environment, in their church and local community. They are encouraged to do this through worship and teaching, reducing carbon emissions, land and individual lifestyles, and to speak up on the climate.

There are three principal independent schemes in the UK to help grass roots churches tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and other pressing environmental issues. They work closely together. 9,248 UK churches are now registered with one or other scheme.

**Eco Church**, run by A Rocha UK, for churches in England and Wales - <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk>

**Eco-Congregation Scotland** is an ecumenical environmental charity supporting local churches throughout Scotland to care and act for God's creation, reducing their impact on climate change and living sustainably - <https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org>

**Eco-Congregation Ireland** is a project of the Church in Society Forum, a standing committee of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, encouraging churches of all denominations across Ireland to take an eco approach - <https://www.ecocongregationireland.com/>

**Live Simply** is the environmental award scheme of the Catholic Church in England and Wales - <https://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/Livesimply-award>

**3) Time is Now Declaration** - organised by the Climate Coalition, of which most members of the Climate Sunday Initiative are also members. <https://thetimeisnow.uk>