

## **Theological reflection, by the Revd Canon Dana Delap**

What does it mean to follow Christ faithfully in an age of ecological crisis?

The Church of England's commitment to reach **net zero carbon** by 2030 is not just an administrative target or a technical challenge—it is a deeply **theological calling** to the churches of this country. It emerges from the nature of God, the vocation of humanity, and the Church's participation in God's mission. It invites congregations to embody the gospel in ways that speak of justice, compassion and hope. Far from being a distraction from mission, our work to reach net zero carbon *is* mission.

The Net Zero Carbon challenge is rooted in **Scripture**. The Psalms constantly turn our attention to the goodness and fragility of the world God has made, since *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it"* (Psalm 24:1). We are responsible to God for our stewardship of his world. When we reduce carbon emissions, insulate our buildings, and employ energy wisely, we honour the One who entrusted creation to human care.

Psalm 82:3 calls us to *"defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed"*. Climate change amplifies existing inequalities, hits the poorest hardest, and threatens the stability of nations. Churches that work towards net zero stand with the vulnerable. This is not peripheral to the gospel, but an aspect of living out the gospel. As we reduce emissions, we move closer to the biblical vision of justice with compassion.

The Church is called to be a **foretaste of the coming kingdom** - a community in which the reconciliation of all things in Christ (Col 1:20) becomes visible. Creation is not incidental to redemption: the New Testament anticipates the **renewal of all creation** (Romans 8:19–23; Revelation 21:1). The calling to reach net zero carbon is eschatological. It expresses hope in God's promised future by living in anticipation of that future, which is already dawning.

The Church's call to mission can be framed through the **Five Marks of Mission**. Working to reach net zero carbon emissions draws these together in a coherent, practical expression of discipleship.

1. *To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.* A church that takes climate action seriously is showing the world what the Good News looks like when lived out. It signals that God's kingdom is marked by healing, not harm, renewal, not destruction.

2. *To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.* Children and young people are acutely aware of ecological anxiety. When churches act boldly, they demonstrate a faith that is credible, grounded, and responsive—nurturing confidence that Christianity speaks meaningfully to modern life.
3. *To respond to human need by loving service.* Climate change around the world disproportionately harms the poorest. By reducing emissions and modelling sustainable living, churches act in love for the vulnerable at home and overseas.
4. *To transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind, and pursue peace and reconciliation.* Climate injustice is one of the defining structural sins of our time. Churches that take seriously the call to reach net zero carbon emissions, are challenging systems that exploit both people and planet.
5. *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.* This speaks directly to the heart of the net zero target. It is a joyful and hopeful call to participate with God in the renewing of the earth.

Church buildings stand at the heart of towns and villages; they are visible signs of the Christian presence. When churches invest in carbon-reduction measures, such as solar panels, heat pumps, insulation, or energy-saving lighting, they become **public witnesses**—showing that faith communities can lead by example. By taking climate responsibility seriously, the church speaks honestly about the world's wounds, and the hope God offers.

Our work to reduce carbon emissions invites the wider community - including local councils, schools, businesses, and families - into a shared project of renewal. This is evangelism in its broadest and richest sense: the church living in such a way that the kingdom of God becomes visible on ordinary streets and village greens.

A church pursuing net zero carbon demonstrates **generosity**. It shows generosity to future generations by refusing to leave them a damaged world; generosity to the global poor by reducing the forces that drive displacement, hunger and conflict; and generosity to the community by lowering running costs and freeing resources for future mission.

This commitment also expresses a deep sense of **welcome**. A warm, well-insulated church is literally welcoming. But beyond our own physical comfort, a church that cares for the environment is offering spiritual welcome: it shows that everyone—young and old, believers and seekers—belongs in a community that values the wellbeing of all creation.

To pursue net zero carbon for our church buildings is a faithful response to Scripture and a natural outworking of the Five Marks of Mission. It is a prophetic engagement with a hurting world, and an act of solidarity with the vulnerable. It is a gesture of generosity, and a sign of welcome. The journey to net zero is a journey into God's future. Churches that walk this path find themselves **aligned with God's transforming love** for all creation.