

# SPECIAL SUNDAYS RELATING TO CARING FOR GOD'S EARTH

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a small green seedling with soil. The background is a blurred green landscape.

WORSHIP & TEACHING

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# Special Sundays

### WHY?

Why mark out special Sundays in order to focus on caring for God's creation? Christians have become increasingly aware of the environmental crisis and have been reawakened to the Christian theology of creation, but not all are familiar with the links between our Christian faith and care for God's earth. By establishing special Sundays with this focus, you can ensure that caring for creation becomes an integral part of your annual programmes, not just something that happens occasionally. Perhaps you could launch a teaching programme related to the environment and/or climate justice or a charitable appeal? Maybe you can plan not only to worship God, but also to integrate social and community activities around the theme as well? If a dedicated Sunday becomes a regular part of your church year, it will gain momentum and you can build on its impact.

God not only cares for people, but for all that he has made. This is good news for us and the whole earth; by dedicating Sundays to this fundamental Christian truth, we are entering into a deeper understanding of what it means to 'earth' the kingdom of heaven.

### HOW?

#### Climate Sunday

In 2021, the Climate Sunday initiative called on all local churches across Great Britain & Ireland to hold a climate-focused service on any Sunday before COP26 (November 2021). Having a Climate Sunday each year is a great way of creating a focus for climate change and environmental issues.

The vision is to leave a lasting legacy of thousands of churches better equipped to address this critical issue as part of their discipleship and mission, and to make a significant contribution to civil society efforts to secure adequate national and international action at COP26. A wide range of resources is available, including service plans, music, sermon outlines and readings:

<https://www.climatesunday.org/service-resources>



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## The Season of Creation

The Season of Creation (or Creationtide) is becoming an essential period in the church year when we can explore the theme of God as Creator through our worship, teaching, practice, charitable giving and more. The Season of Creation runs from 1 September–4 October (the feast day of St Francis) and was introduced by the late Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios I in 1989; it was adopted by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland in 2008.

<https://seasonofcreation.org/>

This time of year may already include a Harvest Festival, so additional Sundays might be woven in to further develop the theme, or perhaps your Harvest Festival could include a focus on climate justice or other local environmental issues? You could encourage your members to walk, cycle or share lifts to church that Sunday; invite a special speaker; arrange a litter-pick after church; encourage members to share their best tips for caring for the environment, or invite them to bring their own mugs to church for coffee. In this way you can use the whole Sunday to teach and inspire people, not just the worship service.

## Lent

Lent, a time of reflection and fasting, is a good time to use Sundays to focus on the impact of the choices we are making. There are numerous resources available to help congregations think more deeply for the 40 days of Lent. In 2020, Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby launched a 'Green Lent' campaign. '#Live Lent: Care for God's Creation', is a 40-day challenge that sits alongside Ruth Valerio's book *'Saying Yes to Life'* with practical challenges such as considering the carbon footprint of the last meal you ate or the amount of water that went into the jeans you are wearing. *Live Lent: Care for God's Creation*, Church House Publishing, 2019



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### LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

There are far-reaching mental health impacts from climate change, with phrases like 'climate grief' and 'eco-anxiety' now commonplace. Climate Sunday can help you think about how to engage with this on a special Sunday or at a pastoral level: <https://www.climatesunday.org/climate-and-pastoral-care>

Different Christian traditions use different dates to focus on our relationship with the environment. Here are a few to inspire:

- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland create resources for Creation Time each year (the five weeks from 1 September): <https://ctbi.org.uk/category/spirituality-and-reflection/creation-time/>
- Green Christian has a number of resources available:  
<https://greenchristian.org.uk/resources/worship-materials/>  
<https://greenchristian.org.uk/recommended-for-advent-and-lent/>
- <https://www.greeningthelectionary.net/> A theological response to the ecological crisis with reflections, prayers, hymns and other resources.

There are also many secular organisations working to protect the planet. Here are a few dates which receive profile in the media that you might consider linking in with on the closest Sunday:

- **The Great Big Green Week** in September, is a UK-wide event, encouraging communities to protect green spaces or hold events to tackle climate change: <https://greatbiggreenweek.com/> or <https://climatefringe.org/week/>
- **Earth Hour** encourages everyone to turn their lights off for an hour on the last Saturday in March to show support for the planet: <https://www.earthhour.org/>
- **Earth Day** Working with 150,000 partners around the world, this organisation holds an annual Earth Day on 22 April each year to educate and activate for the protection of the planet: <https://www.earthday.org/>



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- **World Environment Day** is celebrated annually on 5 June. Originally designated by the United Nations, it encourages governments, businesses and citizens to be active in addressing urgent environmental issues: <https://www.worldenvironmentday.global/>

### CASE STUDIES

The Anglican Diocese of Salisbury have engaged their congregations with environmental issues during Lent and at Easter. See these separate documents in this resource section:

- **Sharing our Story: Salisbury Diocese resource for Lent** – 'Get Outside for Lent', a six-week course, celebrates a different aspect of nature each week including trees, flowers, water and soil.
- **Sharing our Story: Salisbury Diocese resource for Easter** – 'Stations of Creation' takes the traditional Good Friday 'Stations of the Cross' service outside in a format suitable for children and families.

Christ Church New created a fun Lent 'Carbon Fast' with daily actions for both adults and kids: <https://ccnm.org/carbonfastforcreation>