



# **A climate action guide for church communities**

**tearfund**



# Introduction

“Let’s imagine a future where we’ve invested in renewable energy, we’ve reduced our use of fossil fuels, and we’ve rallied, voted, and made crucial decisions that have protected the lives of millions of people. We live our lives more locally and with more simplicity, and we know the people in our church and neighbourhoods really well. Our kids breathe clean air, they play in local parks and green spaces, and they struggle to imagine a time when other kids like them struggled to breathe due to air pollution. When extreme weather events strike, we’re prepared because we have resilient infrastructure and strong community relationships. Our churches are intergenerational hubs of our community, with members who are sure in their identity as children of God and in their calling to love their local and global neighbours. And we tell our kids the stories of how we acted for them, how we prayed, how we spoke out with churches across Aotearoa, and how we worked together to create this better future.”

We’re facing a climate crisis. As global temperatures continue to rise, rains are becoming less reliable and extreme weather events, like droughts and floods, are becoming more frequent and severe. These changes are spreading disease, contributing to conflict and political instability, and pushing communities back into poverty. **But there’s hope. We still have time to act to stave off the worst-case scenarios, and many individuals, churches, organisations and governments are already taking action.**

We know God’s vision is a world where all creation thrives. We can hold on to the hope and knowledge that, through the resurrection of Jesus, this vision will be realised. As Christians, we’re invited to join God in working to make this a reality. We’re called to act justly and to love our neighbours. Acting justly means responding to the needs of our immediate communities and those further afield. As the climate crisis pushes people back into poverty, might we, as churches and Christians, be called for such a time as this?

The Church is the world’s largest community organisation, and together, we can play a crucial role in addressing the climate crisis. *This guide* can help your church respond to climate change. It contains actions that will equip your community to have far-reaching impacts and influence the decisions of those in power. We’ve structured this guide in three sections: *engaging prophetically*, *engaging practically* and *engaging in prayer*. Each section focuses on different but important ways church communities can respond to the climate crisis. We suggest you pick an idea from each of the three categories—make it a goal for the upcoming year and do it with your church community. As more and more churches take action, we’ll create real momentum.

It may be that your church community is not quite ready to start taking action, and instead, you’re at the stage of starting a conversation with your congregation and leadership first. Kia kaha—this is important work! Doing it together as a church community is crucial for impact and long-term sustainability. We suggest using the resources we’ve listed below to get this conversation started and come back to the rest of this guide when your church is ready to start taking action.

Tearfund UK’s **template** for a climate change sermon

*Christianity and Climate Change*: A **film series** for small groups

**Book a Tearfund speaker** to share with your congregation

# Advocating as a church

## Engaging Prophetically

Throughout the Bible, there are stories of God's people speaking prophetically and advocating for justice. We can remember Moses asking Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt or Queen Esther petitioning King Xerxes to spare the life of her people. Using a prophetic voice means looking at the world through God's eyes and intentions. Just like the prophets of the Old Testament, it means calling out present situations for what they are and describing instead a future that might be.

Our world needs action on every level, from individuals to international bodies like the United Nations. We know that decisions that get made on a larger scale—whether they be international treaties, national policies, or corporate commitments—have the power to create widespread and systemic change. Change that our global community desperately needs.

When speaking together as a church community or a network of churches, you can influence leaders and those with power to make decisions that protect God's creation and people living in poverty. This type of action is what Tearfund calls advocacy. It could include petitioning senior leaders in your network of churches, the local council, corporations, and even the New Zealand Government. Public pressure creates change. We only need to learn from the stories of St Thomas Anglican Church and Coquerial Baptist Church below to see how a single church can play a role in persuading councils and governments to make decisions with far-reaching impacts.

### **The Anglican Diocese of Wellington and the Zero Carbon Act**

In 2019, the Anglican Diocese of Wellington to campaign for the New Zealand Government to pass the Zero Carbon Act. One Sunday morning, young people from churches across the diocese shared about climate change and encouraged parishioners to write a submission as part of government proceedings. Collectively, the diocese submitted more than 500 submissions.

## What could acting together look like in your church?

### Support campaigns to influence governments and businesses

Join Tearfund and other organisations in their climate campaigning and advocacy. Sign up to Tearfund's **advocacy mailing list**, and be ready to respond.

### Join the Rubbish Campaign

Our world has an urgent rubbish problem that's impacting the climate and people living in poverty. Use this **Church Pack** to talk to your church community about plastic pollution and encourage church members to sign **Tearfund's Rubbish Petition** as a way of speaking up.

### Influence your MP or local councillor

Here's a guide on **how to write to or email your local MP**. MPs and local councillors rely on support from you and others in your local area. This means your opinions are important to them! Let them know that acting on climate change is important to you, and let them know what they can do about it.

# Taking action as a church

## Engaging Practically

Climate action is needed on every level of society—from international bodies to individuals. We all know that churches are not just buildings—they are communities of passionate and diverse people. So, alongside speaking up, church communities can also be instrumental at encouraging each other to make changes to their lifestyles and engage in local climate action together. Across Aotearoa, there are so many examples of churches acting in this space, from collaborating with local groups for planting days to running emission reduction challenges. Participating in such events isn't just beneficial for the planet, but it's also been helpful for bringing church communities closer together!

### The River-Ōpāwaho's planting days

One Sunday a month, The River-Ōpāwaho church in Christchurch takes their regular worship service outside to plant natives alongside their local Ōpāwaho River. Over the past few years, they've planted about 2500 natives.

## What could acting together look like in your church?

### Create or participate in a climate action challenge as a church community

Living more sustainably is an important contribution individuals and families can make. Perhaps there's a challenge your church community could take that would reduce emissions and be an opportunity for some gentle, competitive fun! Committing to using public transport, walking, or cycling are great actions people in urban areas can take. Reducing the number of meat meals our families eat is another.

### Walk the talk and work on your church's emissions

A Rocha and Climate Stewards' **360 Calculator** is a free tool churches can use to measure their emissions and implement an emission-reduction action plan.

### Participate in planting days

Join a local restoration group, get outside as a church community, help plant some native trees, and spend time with one another in a different context.

# Interceding as a church

## Engaging in Prayer

As Christians, we believe that prayer is powerful and does change things. At Tearfund, we believe it will play an instrumental role in helping tackle the climate crisis. Prayer is also a key for us personally and as church communities. Prayer feeds and sustains passion and aligns us more closely with God. The more we pray, the more we become passionate about making change happen. In times when we feel despair, prayers of lament allow us to process our grief. In the times we feel overwhelmed and small in the face of great challenges, we can find comfort in praying to the God who made the entirety of Creation. Prayer is also an opportunity for God to shape our worldviews and desires and place particular actions on our hearts.

Often, the challenge is not as much about how to pray for the climate but about knowing what to pray for. The following prayer points are a great starting point.

- **Following an extreme weather event:** Pray for affected communities, the swift distribution of aid and resources, and a quick recovery.
- **In the lead-up to a key climate decision being made internationally, nationally, or locally:** Pray that compassionate and ambitious decisions will be made by those in power.
- **Throughout the year:** Pray for communities whose lives and livelihoods are increasingly being impacted by extreme weather events and the slower onset impacts of climate change.
- Pray that members of your church congregation would continue to act with care for Creation and love for one's neighbours, as Jesus demonstrated.

### **Knox Presbyterian Church's Service of Lament**

In 2019, Knox Presbyterian in Ōtepoti-Dunedin organised a special service, 'Lament for our earth'. Led by the church choir, it was an opportunity for church members and wider community to come together to express their hopes and fears for the world.

## What could this look like in your church?

### Intercede for the climate in your worship services

Use the prayer points above as a guide for how and when to include climate change intercession in your regular worship services.

### Organise a service of lament

Churches can offer their members and community a powerful tool in the form of prayers of lament. In today's world, it can be challenging to find a place and process to acknowledge and cope with the pain, hopelessness, and guilt that we may carry.

### Create or add to a prayer space at your Church

Devoting a space to pray about climate change is a great way to encourage interactive and devoted prayer. Check out [24/7](#) and [Tearfund UK's guide](#) for ways you could set up this space



# Setting next steps for your church

This guide has been created to assist your church in determining the next steps to take in responding to climate change. The suggested actions range from simple to complex, but all are powerful. Their impact is amplified when we take prophetic and practical action in addition to prayerful consideration. We recommend choosing one idea from each of the three sections, setting it as a goal for the upcoming year, and working on it together with your church community.

We'd love to hear about the actions your church is taking. We'd also like to know if there's anything we can do to support you on the journey. Reach out to us at [advocacy@tearfund.org.nz](mailto:advocacy@tearfund.org.nz) and a member of our Church Engagement team will be in touch.