**If only we had known…**

****I’ve been reflecting on what my church and myself personally could have done differently, if only we had known that the pandemic was coming. Even six months warning and I think we all might have done some training in video conferencing, made sure everyone in the church was in a buddy group and of course got a stock of loo roll and pasta in.

If we had thought it through a bit more, maybe we would have organised a town wide or village strategy to ensure the most vulnerable were cared for, fed and safe. Perhaps we would have started a healthy eating drive or stopped smoking to improve our chances with Covid-19. We certainly would have expected the government to put money into researching a vaccine and bolstering the NHS.

One thing that has struck me profoundly in the last few months is how governments and individuals have understood the science, assessed the risk and radically changed their behaviour accordingly.

So what about the even greater threat to our society, humanity, and God’s creation - climate breakdown? We have known about this for decades and have time to prepare. What am I doing and how could my church be playing it’s part to save lives?

Unlike coronavirus, we already understand much of the science of climate change, the research has been conducted, but there is no “vaccine” that has the potential to stop runaway climate change if we continue to increase the greenhouse gases we emit. Unlike coronavirus, where we have all leant to social distance, wash our hand and wear a mask to protect others, most of us don’t assess the risks of our daily fossil fuel lifestyles and how these impact on our neighbours. And how would we feel about radically changing our behaviour to save lives? We have all the tools to decarbonise, are we choosing to use them yet?

We are in the foothills of the effects of climate change and just like the pandemic, it shines a light on the inequality in our society. In the UK, those living in poor quality housing are more likely to be flooded and unable to afford adequate home insurance and in heatwaves it’s the elderly who are most likely to die from heatstroke. If we are to love our neighbours as ourselves, we should care about climate justice.

In the global picture, it is the Western developed world (which has the highest per capita carbon emissions), that can best adapt to rising sea levels and more extreme weather, whereas countries such as Bangladesh will feel the greatest impact and have the fewest resources to develop resilience and are the least responsible for causing global heating. If black lives matter, we should care about climate justice.

As the UK government looks to invest in a green recovery, what action can we take personally to be part of the solution?

Perhaps it’s time for some personal carbon emissions training. You could use the 10 point plan at [www.leeds.anglican.org/environment/what-can-i-do](http://www.leeds.anglican.org/environment/what-can-i-do) to help you get in shape. Or how about getting stuck in with your local climate action group to ensure the most vulnerable in our communities benefit from government investment in green jobs, funding for energy efficiency improvements in homes and active travel initiatives.

While hindsight is a wonderful thing, for the climate emergency we already have the science, can assess the risk and have everything we need to change our behaviour. When we look back, we won’t be able to say “If only we had known….”

Jemima Parker, Diocesan Environment Officer

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