

# WHY SHOULD YOUR CHURCH COMMIT TO A LIVING LENT?

*So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*

*Romans 12:1-3 (MSG)*

We believe that creating a climate for change needs to be done with God, not just in general, and that's why doing it as a church can be an important journey of discipleship. Here we offer some thoughts about opening up this conversation with your community:

- Living Lent is about recognising that changing our climate is **not just an activity, but a lifestyle**. We can buy a reusable coffee cup, but not ask who grew our coffee and how much they were paid, or we can refuse a plastic bag whilst buying fast fashion from a child sweatshop. Being opened up for whole-life transformation is something that requires the help of the Holy Spirit. The word for transformation in Greek involves the idea of turning around and changing direction. Our entire lives need to be lived in discipleship to Christ: from how we spend our money to the way we vote.

- It's about **hungering and thirsting for righteousness** – and righteousness is always defined by who God is. Prayer and worship will be at the heart of how we can renew the world.
- It's **Lenten**: Lent is a time of self-discipline in order to grow in our discipleship. We examine our habits and hindrances for living faithful lives with God. Our environmental damage is making more of our earth barren wilderness; we should travel there to have our eyes opened for our need for renewal.
- It's about **being transformed by and in our relationships**. Doing this together matters, because a community can convict you, hold you accountable, inspire you and encourage you. This is the heart of being church together.
- This also reminds us that we are not just doing this for ourselves to feel holy: this is part of our **Christian call to love our neighbours**. Climate change impacts the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world already, and so our Christian call to bear the burdens of our weakest members means that those of us in the affluent west need to recognise our own abuse of the earth's resources.
- It's **missional**. People beyond the church also care about the earth. If we lead the way in stewarding it wisely then we gain the chance to share some of our story about why we care.
- **The earth is the Lord's**, and everything in it. God created this planet and declared it very good. Even after we contaminated it with sin, God promised that he would never flood the earth again. The creation – and everyone in it – is precious to God. We should value what God values.

It's only 40 days, but it will have an impact forever. As your church journey through hard questions and tests out difficult solutions in a safer, time limited way, we will find ourselves becoming people who act with greater compassion and commitment to God for the whole of our lives.

## How can you do this as a church?

Living Lent is a resource that is designed to help your church's discipleship and mission as you go through Lent. Here are our top tips to get you started:

**Preach it:** Use the lectionary notes, which are designed to find the ecological angle to each of the set Sunday readings. If your church doesn't use the lectionary, you could try these notes as a bible study instead.

**Pray it:** Find time in weekly prayer meetings, small groups or Sunday services to pray for the earth. Prayer brings us into deeper relationship with God, ourselves and others and it has a way of forming us in the depth of who we are. As we approach climate change we need this depth of transformation and the power of the Holy Spirit to challenge our sinful structures.

**Live it:** Encourage people to sign up independently to one of the challenges. In addition, act together as a church on one of these communal issues. Doing a communal activity is a public act of commitment that together you're seeking change. Here are some of the options available:

**Sign up to become an eco-church or eco-congregation:** Find out more here: <https://ecochurch.arochoa.org.uk>. If you are in Scotland, find out about eco-congregation here: <http://www.ecocongregation.org/>.

**Go single-use plastic free:** spot the coffee cups, water coolers, kids straws, plastic spoons that are part of your church activities and Sunday services. You could involve your youth and children in helping to spot the places this happens.

**Big switch:** move your church energy supplier and save money for yourself and save the planet. Find out more here: <https://www.bigchurchswitch.org.uk>

**Find out about how ethically your money is invested:** We are responsible for what our money pays for, and how this might be encouraging industries which contribute significantly towards climate change. You can explore what investing your money ethically looks like with these websites:

Christian Aid: The Big Shift -

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/campaigns/climate-change/the-big-shift>

Become an Ethical Money Church with ECCR –

<http://www.eccr.org.uk/>

Bright Now: Towards Fossil Free Churches –

<http://brightnow.org.uk/>

**Launch it:** You could do this informally in a pancake party, or more formally in an Ash Wednesday church service (or both!). Traditionally ash is made from the left over palm crosses that are burnt. Get people to write the action they are giving up on to their palm cross, then burn the palm crosses together.

When cooled, break up the ash and make a paste with it using olive oil. Talk about how we were formed out of dust and to dust we will return. The word we use for dust now is usually atoms, and we share some of the same atoms as the stars in the sky. But there is another side to the ash: reflect on the way we have destroyed the planet, burning fossil fuels, destroying planets and causing death. Allow people to make a cross with the ash on the back of their hands, or you could offer the opportunity to have this cross made on their foreheads with the traditional words 'remember you are dust and to dust you shall return'.

Keep in touch, and let us know how your church is getting on. You can do this through the community area of our website, or by getting in touch on twitter, using @livinglent2019.



**Creating a climate of change.**

[www.livinglent.org](http://www.livinglent.org)

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Living Lent is hosted by The Joint Public Issues Team.