

Opportunities for church engagement in UN Climate Talks 2021 (COP26)

Background

Christian Action Bristol is seeking to bring together churches from across the city to take climate action. This briefing paper outlines the importance of church engagement in the run up to the UK hosting the global UN climate talks in November 2021 in Glasgow (COP26), as well as providing a timeline of key opportunities for this engagement.

Relevance of COP26

Global climate talks are taking place in Glasgow at the end of the year. This is a hugely important summit, where dozens of world leaders will convene, and the eyes of the world will be on the UK. John Kerry, the US climate envoy, has called these talks "the last best chance" to avert the worst environmental consequences for the world. It will be the first COP (UN Council of Parties) to take place after the landmark Paris Agreement's measures take effect and the first opportunity since then for nations to come together to review commitments and strengthen ambition.

There are plans in place for the wider city of Bristol to mark this opportunity, as part of the council-led One City plan that aims to engage citizens in achieving Bristol's 2030 climate and ecological goals. This provides a wonderful opportunity for Christian leaders to play a role and speak on behalf of Bristol churches by recognising the climate emergency, and our call to care for God's creation. It is also an opportunity for us all collectively to urge our national and global representatives to take strong action at the COP summit.

For further information on how churches nationally are speaking into this area, see [Tearfund's Prayer for the Climate campaign](#) and [Christian Aid plans](#).

Key opportunities to engage

In Bristol, the following milestones are emerging:

13th – 16th July: Event to welcome the Youth Christian Climate Network relay into the city.

Young Christians are walking between the G7 meeting in Cornwall in June, up to Glasgow for the COP summit in November. Along the way, they will stay for a few days in 10 city hubs – and Bristol is one of them. For more information about the relay, see: [RELAY | YCCN](#)

As a church community in the city, we'd love to host them, welcome them, and celebrate them through at least one open event. This event will give a great opportunity to come together to make a public statement, as senior church leaders, collectively recognising a climate emergency, and encouraging churches in each of our denominations to commit to further environmental action.

Ideas include:

- Holding a prayer vigil on College Green as a public witness of our faith and our care for creation, with senior church leaders playing an active role and representing their denominations and churches.

- Inviting city & NGO partners (e.g. Mayor, Tearfund/CA) to share the stage and speak alongside Christian leaders at key moments through the vigil.
- Inviting local press representatives and appointing spokespeople to raise the profile of Christians taking action for the climate crisis.

Sunday 5th September: Climate Sunday

Climate Sunday is an ecumenical partnership, organised by Churches Together in Britain & Ireland, encouraging churches across the UK to hold a climate-focused service on any Sunday before 5th September 2021. The final Sunday is the culmination of the campaign, with many high-profile services taking place and being streamed around the country to share church commitments and pray for bold action and courageous leadership at COP26. Bristol Cathedral will also hold a Climate Sunday service that day.

During their Climate Sunday, churches are invited to do one or more of three things:

Worship: Hold a climate-focused service, to explore the theological and scientific basis of creation care and action on climate, to pray, and to commit to action.

Commit: Make a commitment as a local church community to taking long-term action to reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions.

Speak up: Join with other churches and wider society by adding its name to a common call for the UK government to take much bolder action on climate change in this country in advance of COP26.

There is potential for one or more church leaders to lead services during this day, as well as be available to speak on local radio about the role of churches across the city in praying and acting for the climate.

1st – 12th November: COP26 meets in Glasgow

During the COP, there will be considerable public attention on climate action. The Pope will be attending Glasgow, to bring a Christian message. This is a key opportunity to use our shared platform to add a distinctive Christian voice from senior church leaders in Bristol.

Ideas include:

- Holding a Faith and Climate roundtable with the City Mayor, MPs and civic leaders
- Projecting images of Christians (and possibly others) holding climate focused messages onto the Cathedral and City Hall. Discussions are currently underway.
- *If you have other ideas for this time, please share them!*