**Missional Community & Cell Groups Outline**

**based on various passages (Linked to sermon of 19/6/16)**

which can be accessed at [www.shirleyparishchurch.org.uk](http://www.shirleyparishchurch.org.uk/)

*These suggestions and questions are only a guide. Feel free to add, chop and amend as is most appropriate for your group or community!*

**Fifth mark of mission: to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth**

**Welcome**

Share an experience when you have been affected by an environmental issue – positively or negatively.

*or* Name your favourite animal or an animal species and share why?

**Worship**

Watch Andrew Leake’s video (<https://vimeo.com/70611555>) “Why didn’t you save the forest?” How did it make you feel?

Indian Theologian RL Sarkar says “The human species now influences the fundamental processes of the planet – ozone depletion, world-wide pollution and climate change are testimonies to our power.” Until 2 centuries ago our influence on the natural world was intrusive and exploitative but not catastrophic on a global scale. Now we are in a different place. Human greed and pride leave a trail of increasing destruction. What do you lament about our world today?

Read/sing/recite/ a psalm that focuses on God and the created order. E.g. Ps 19, 104, 148

Use it as a base to praise God for his creation and to offer lament for the damaged environment. This can be done by letting each person choose (it can be more than once) something sweet (praise) or something sour (lament) - e.g. honey and lemons, Haribo confectionary.

*Or use this prayer from Australia:*

In the beginning,

God created, God created the heavens and the earth; *(soil)*

light from darkness, day from night; *(large candle)*

waters below from waters above, earth from seas; *(water)*

lights in the sky – sun and moon and stars. *(small candles)*

**And God saw that it was good.**

Then God spoke and the earth brought forth vegetation;

*(branch/ fruit/ flower)*

plants yielding seed of every kind,

trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. *(seeds)*

**And God saw that it was good.**

And God spoke again, and the waters filled with living creatures,

birds flew in the sky above the earth,

the earth brought forth living creatures,

domestic and wild animals of every kind upon earth.

**And God saw that it was good.**

Then God spoke into being humankind,

male and female created in the image of God,

given dominion over all creation,

filled with the breath, wind, Spirit of the creator.

*Pause to listen to your own breathing*

**God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good.**

**Option 1 – sermon-based discussion**

Listen to the sermon together, then (with your Bibles open) reflect on some of these questions:

What struck you most about the passage or sermon?

What did you want the preacher to explore more?

What questions does it leave you with?

What positive thing can you do as a group to contribute positively to this aspect of mission?

Pray about what you’ve been discussing (see the prayer section at the end).

**Option 2 – more detailed questions**

*The Word section of these notes was prepared by Andy Sawyer prior to the sermon on Sunday and have only been modified slightly by an appreciative Paul Thaxter!*

**1. Creation still has purposes which God has declared**

* To praise God: Psalms 19:1 and 148:9-13; Rev. 5:13[[1]](#endnote-1)
* To reveal God’s nature to us: Psalm 19:1-4; Rom. 1:18-20
* To provide us with food and shelter: Gen. 2:15; 9:3
* To be enjoyed by God? Psalm 104:31 suggests God enjoys his creation. Job 40:20 and Psalm 104:26 suggest he likes seeing animals playing in it.
* Creation is incomplete without human input Gen. 2.5
* Creation was given to us to 'have dominion' over it Gen. 1:26
* Creation is for us to use and look after (‘cultivate and keep’) Gen. 2:15
* Creation was meant to be named (described, comprehended) by humans Gen. 2:19
* Creation remains very profoundly God’s property. Not ours. Psalm 24:1; 89:11, Lev. 25:23 Col. 1:15-16

Q. Safeguarding the integrity of creation is an essential part of the Christian life - Discuss

**2. What is the future of the creation?**

Many faiths and belief systems:

* deprecate the physical aspects of the world
* see the physical as inferior to the spiritual.
* depicted 'heaven' in purely spiritual terms
* see the creation as something that will pass away.

2 Peter 3[[2]](#endnote-2) and Revelation 21:1[[3]](#endnote-3) Looks – at first glance at least – as though it supports this view.

Q. Is it your view?

Q. If so, how do you reconcile those readings with the following?:

Psalm 96:11-13 / The psalmist looks forward to creation being restored and praising God. (Note Psalms are very closely linked to Messianic prophecy and redemption).

Matthew 19:28 / Jesus looks forward to our being restored in the context of 'the renewal of all things'. [NB. 'new' in some translations is very poor. ‘Regeneration' (see NIV, NASB & ESV n.1), is correct.]

Romans 8.21-23 / Paul states, very clearly, that God’s original creation, which all around us is broken, is waiting to be restored – redeemed – with us.

Colossians 1:15-20 / Christ – in the context of the ‘firstborn of creation’ – will ‘reconcile all things … on earth or in heaven’ to himself.

Revelation 21:5 / Jesus clearly says 'Behold, I am making all things new'. He doesn’t say ‘I am making all new things’.

Is he talking about replacement or renewal of all things?

Q. In the light of these texts, do you think God intended to write off creation and just redeem humanity?

Q. Given the integral nature of the creation in this image of Christ's return, how should we treat the environment?

**3. Our attitude**

Christians commonly believe that God created humans and intended them to be good, and he has redeemed us and will restore us to perfection one day. This affects how we treat people. As we have seen, the Bible appears to say God also created everything else, and intends to redeem that too.

Q. How should this affect the way we treat creatures and the land? What does good news look life for creatures and the land?

‘Because we all live on the same planet and are ultimately dependent on the natural fruits of the earth for life-support, everyone has a stake in how elements of nature and natural systems are used and managed.’

Q. We know our well-being is tied to our environment, e.g. the more it is broken, the more the poor suffer. Is it ok if our lack of care for the environment hurts our neighbours? Or is caring for the environment actually part of loving our neighbours?

'The final hope of Christians is not heaven, but fulfilment in God’s restoration of all things to perfection.'

Q. In the light of this Bible study, do you agree?

‘Christians know God created the world, and we are only its stewards or trustees. The very first verse of the Bible says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). When we see the world as a gift from God, we will do our best to take care of it and use it wisely, instead of poisoning or destroying it.’ (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association)

**Witness**

**Some dangers to be aware of:**

* Environmentalism is trendy and popular. We aren’t called to be either.
* Environmentalism is shot-through with worldly thinking. We too easily adopt some of it without biblical mandate.
* Creation should not be elevated or worshipped: see Romans 1:20-23
* Like the poor being always with us, the environment is always being broken. And yet in neither case are we excused from responding. Nor are we to be distracted.
* We are broken people. We inevitably destroy God’s creation by our actions, even when we try not to. We need his grace, and creation needs his healing.

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you respond to this focus on the 5th mark of mission

Repentance:

Lifestyle:

What positive thing can you do as a group to contribute positively to this aspect of mission?

**Prayer time**

Pray for our two mission partners who focus on this fifth mark of mission:

1. A Rocha (http://arocha.org.uk/get-involved/pray)

2. Andrew Leake (http://www.shirleyparishchurch.org.uk/leakefamily.htm)

Pray also for each other, and steps you want to take to put this mark of mission into practice.

1. How do trees ‘praise’ God? It may be helpful to think how we praise God. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The following might be noted in considering 2 Peter 3🕙:10. First, it seems at odds with much else in scripture. Second, there’s a problem with translation - some versions (ESV and oddly the NASB) say the earth will be ‘burned’. Others (NIV, NRSV) have ‘laid bare’ or ‘disclosed’ or similar. Third, Peter’s style is somewhat idiosyncratic and hard to follow in places. So, given the apocalyptic nature of the passage it’s tempting to agree with scholars such as D.B. Wallace who suggest ‘the earth and the works [done by men] in it will be stripped bare [before God]’ as being closer to its meaning. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Similarly, Revelation 21:1 appears to contradict other passages at first glance. It is a quote from Isaiah 65:17, part of a passage where the new world is described in very similar terms to the one we see today. It can be argued that ‘new’ here is in the sense of being freed or cleansed from humanity’s failure and sin. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)