



# Justice and creation care: An Interview with Caroline Pomeroy

**CAROLINE WAS INTERVIEWED BY MISSIONAL FOCUS GUEST EDITOR ANDY KINGSTON-SMITH IN JUNE 2023.**

**Andy Kingston-Smith (AKS):** Thanks so much Caroline for talking to us. I wanted to tease out from you two aspects. One was the justice implications around creation care, and more specifically the work you are doing with carbon off-setting and the projects you have been involved in.

Secondly, thinking through missional or mission-related application as well; some of the theological perspectives that would be helpful to think through.

Please can you tell us about yourself and Climate Stewards.

**Caroline Pomeroy (CP):** I am Director of Climate Stewards. My background is that at university I studied Land Economy which qualified me to become a Chartered Surveyor. I love Geography and the outdoors, sailing, walking and cycling.

My husband and I had previously worked in Ghana with Tearfund, with environmental projects and setting up a little environmental NGO and doing some study on the theology of creation care. I then did a master's degree in climate change, practice and sustainability.

I also worked with the diocese of Bath and Wells as an environmental officer, based in Somerset at my local diocese part-time alongside climate change groups.

**AKS:** To get the ball rolling, could you give us some thoughts to what you see as some of the big issues of climate injustice today?

**CP:** I think probably the top one is those who have done least to cause it, bear the brunt of the consequences. The extracting and burning of fossil fuels. We, in the West, are benefiting from that legacy. By and large, people who are being hurt the most by climate changes are those in the Global South. Most of whom have had absolutely no benefits from the process of industrialisation.

So, there is huge inequality, and we are living on the back of that. Most people in poor countries are less able to adapt and they are seeing a bigger impact from climate change because of geography and extreme weather. They have few resources and less resilience to adapt to these climate impacts.

The impacts are unequal and many of us in the West are rich enough to make choices as to how we do things. The general trend is that the more money you have, the bigger your carbon footprint, which is a strong correlation. So, people who can afford to fly around the world on holiday generally do so. In the UK people who have the lowest footprint tend to be the poorest people, because they cannot afford to do a lot of things that I might take for granted.

**AKS:** I would like to get your thoughts around the biblical missional imperative for creation care; why should Christians really care? One of the big arguments is that there are many other priorities that we should be involved in. How would you respond to the attitude that this is not a top priority and what would be a biblical imperative for focusing on it?

**CP:** Right through the Bible there are many passages that tell us that we

should care for creation... from Genesis to Revelation. In Genesis 1 and 2, Adam and Eve are called to tend the garden, to serve and preserve, to be good stewards. At the end of Genesis 1, verse 28 says that humans have been given dominion over creation. This has often been misquoted or misinterpreted as 'ruling over' creation. But dominion is not domination, and I think we have wrongly dominated the Earth. Dominion is about a loving, kingly type of 'rule' and Jesus the Servant King is the best example of how to exercise this dominion.

I have a Green Bible in which there are over 2,000 passages written in green relating to the environment - water, land, air, animals, plants etc. I think this tells you that the Bible is a very earthy book. But we've tended to ignore that aspect of it. We generally focus on the vertical relationship between us and God, and the horizontal relationships between us and other people, largely ignoring our relationship with the earth. The Bible describes the relationship between God, humankind and creation, as a triangular one - we are all interdependent.

So, we are all inter-connected and inter-linked. We can see that around us; we can also read that in the Bible, but we tend to filter out earthy things and focus on 'spiritual things'. That is a failing we have inherited from a certain theological viewpoint which separates spiritual from earthy, material things; actually, they are all important to God. At the end of the Gospel of Mark, we are told to preach the good news to 'all creation' (Mark 16:15)!

**AKS:** Tell us more about Climate Stewards and specifically the concept of carbon offsetting and how it works from a Christian perspective.

**CP:** Climate Stewards helps individuals and organisations to measure, reduce



and then to offset their carbon footprints. You could describe offsetting as compensation - we, who can afford to have a carbon-hungry lifestyle, consume more than our fair share and emit more carbon dioxide than the world can afford. By offsetting we can compensate for this by repairing the damage and helping those who are suffering as a result of climate change.

The average Brit has a carbon footprint of 8-10 tons of carbon dioxide per year, equivalent to about 45 London buses' CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This CO<sub>2</sub> is adding to the blanket of global warming gases around the atmosphere, causing the Earth's temperature to rise. If I lived in Rwanda, my emissions would be about 0.1 tonnes per year. If I lived in Qatar, it would be nearer 30 tonnes. So, it is a huge range, but you can see that the richest countries are burning more fossil fuels. To keep ourselves on a safe trajectory as a planet, each person would have a carbon budget of about 2 tonnes.

So Climate Stewards encourages people first of all to measure their carbon footprint by using one of our online carbon calculators. Then we encourage people to think about how to reduce their footprint, perhaps by travelling less, or eating less meat or buying second-hand. The general principle is to constantly be asking ourselves if we can live more lightly on the Earth - Do I need to buy this? Can I buy a greener version? Can I simplify that? Can I use less of that? If I am making a journey, can I walk or go by public transport rather than car or plane? Can I combine trips and travel less?

We then encourage people to pay an amount of money which compensates for those emissions. This is used to fund our partner projects in the Global South which help communities to not only lock up carbon (as trees grow) and reduce emissions (by using cleaner technologies) but also to adapt to the impacts of climate change. These include tree growing projects with churches, schools and communities; water filters so families have access to clean water without boiling; and clean cookstoves which save fuel and improve health. We work closely with our partners to help them count and measure the carbon savings and make sure the projects are sustainable.

**AKS:** How do you answer critics who might

say it is more important to focus on reduction or simplification rather than offsetting, as I suspect many might be tempted to look at offsetting as a way of justifying the continuation of their high-emitting lifestyle.

**CP:** You are right - this is a risk! George Monbiot described offsetting as 'papal indulgences' - you pay others to do your dirty work for you but make no effort to reduce your own emissions; this is greenwashing.

However, in our experience the people and organisations who come to us really are concerned about their carbon footprint. They are doing whatever they can reduce it, but they recognise that they won't get to zero in the current fossil-fuel-based economy and want to be responsible about their unavoidable carbon emissions. So they choose to compensate for their emissions by supporting Climate Stewards' offsetting projects.







**AKS:** As a separate issue, there is much climate disinformation and/or fake news. Where do we turn? It can be so confusing.

**CP:** There is some very deliberate disinformation. If you read certain media and social media outlets you will get very skewed views. The BBC generally now provides clear, accurate information, and there are lots of other good websites and podcasts – take a look at our [Resources page](#) for some suggestions.

**AKS:** What advice would you give a college like ForMission to help us to move in the right direction?

**CP:** I agree with Katharine Hayhoe, a Christian climate scientist, who says that the most important thing we can do about climate change is talk about it. Start having these conversations in our church, our small groups, children's work and everywhere you can think of! It should become a normal part of conversation for Christians to be talking about climate change.

Quite apart from the biblical calling to care for creation out of love and obedience to God, I also think it is huge missional opportunity. People notice when Christians take action on climate change. Recently, I was running a local biodiversity day for families in my village churchyard.

A woman came to visit the church, noticed what was going on and asked about it. She said, 'This is amazing... I have never seen a church doing anything like that.' She gave me £10 for the project!

It's also important to remember that individual behaviour change alone will not solve climate change. We need governments to take bold action and create incentives for businesses, colleges, churches and individuals to make good choices for a cleaner, more sustainable world. And to make that happen we will need to raise our voices by voting and lobbying those in power, so they know that we care.

**AKS:** At ForMission, what should be our top three priorities in this area?

**CP:** The big elements of an organisation's carbon footprint tend to be travel and energy usage. I know that at ForMission you've already done a lot to cut down on your travel, but there will always be more you can do to encourage staff and students to switch to public transport, liftshare, walk or cycle.

In terms of buildings, you could ask your landlords about considering switching to a renewable energy provider, making your building more efficient by managing heating and cooling carefully, adding insulation, cutting out draughts, and getting ready to move away from oil and gas

when boilers, cookers etc. need replacing. You could also look at the food you serve (less meat, more veggie), using recycled paper and finding ways to cut out single use plastic.

And finally, it's great that you are talking to me about this topic, and integrating creation care into the curriculum so that students will be actively engaging with this and adopting it as a normal part of their ministry.

### **Recommended Resources**

Resources that may be useful in your own response to this article.

- [Operation Noah](#) and the [John Ray Initiative](#) both offer lots of good resources on climate change, divestment, and the Christian call to care for creation.
- The [Eco Church website](#) contains church surveys, more resources, and all you need to know about registering for Eco Church.
- Many denominations (including the [Church of England](#) and the [Methodists](#)) have useful resources about how to respond to climate change.