

# How 2016 brought winds of change

By **Nicholas Holtam**

"It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." The opening lines of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* could have been written about the current state of climate change policy internationally!

The early ratification of the Paris Agreement by so many major countries – including the UK – was an inspiring sign that the world, as divided as ever on so much, might be able to come together to protect the environment that sustains us all.

Some 117 countries have now ratified the Paris Agreement – among them 14 of the world's 15 biggest carbon emitters, including India and Japan, almost all of Europe, and big emerging economies like Indonesia and Brazil.

For me, one of the most hopeful moments in 2016 came in September, when China and the USA stood out in front as the first two of the major carbon emitting countries to ratify Paris. Presidents Obama and Xi made personal commitments on behalf of their countries to the stringent reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions necessary to meet the target of limiting temperature rise to well below 2°C from pre-industrial levels.

There is no Planet B. For Christians especially, our world and its environment is a gift from God. It is our duty to take care of what he has created – in Genesis, God gave us dominion over the earth for its sake, not for selfish abuse.

Jesus admonished the Pharisees and Sadducees that they could predict the weather, but not interpret the signs of the times. (Mt 16.2-3) In our generation, however, the signs of the times and the signs of the

weather are in consonance. We have no excuses if we are not able to read them.

Fifteen of the 16 warmest years on record have occurred this century. 2016 looks set to be even hotter. NASA reported that September 2016 was the warmest month worldwide, ever.

Here in the UK, five of the six wettest years since records began have occurred since 2000. Flooding is on the increase. Oxford University researchers have calculated that climate change has increased the risk of catastrophic flooding in this country by two-to-three times.

We also have a duty to listen to our Christian brothers and sisters in countries already much more severely affected by the impacts of climate change than we are. Those worst affected usually use few fossil fuels and generate little CO<sub>2</sub>.

Bishop Jonathan, from Davao in the Philippines, has told me of the devastation caused in his Diocese by increased frequency of typhoons. In the Philippines, there is little of the climate change denialism we see in some rich Western countries – the effects are too obvious to ignore.

Bishop Api, from Fiji, has told me of changing rainfall patterns, rising sea levels and, as in the Philippines, more intense storms. Earlier this year, Fiji was hit by its first recorded Category 5 Cyclone; the devastation affected around 40 per cent of the population. Like its Pacific neighbours, Fiji is one of the lowest emitters of CO<sub>2</sub> on the planet, yet it stands to be one of the countries most profoundly affected by climate change.

We cannot be silent when our fellow human beings, not least



our fellow Christians, are subject to such an offence against natural justice. There is real anger among some of our fellow Christians in the developing world that many in wealthy countries are still arguing about whether a clear and obvious danger to them even exists.

Nonetheless, there has been real progress on shifting to renewables. In 2016, global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are set to remain static for the third year in a row. We will need to see them actually decline to meet the stretching Paris targets, but we may be reaching peak carbon. Renewables capacity is expanding and technology, including storage technology, is advancing. Electric cars are becoming cheaper and more effective.

Renewables produced more electricity than coal for six months in the middle of this year in the UK. Scotland now has periods in the summer where its entire energy supply comes from renewables. That's part of a growing international trend.

China has seen a massive growth in renewables, with

wind energy quadrupling over the past five years with solar growing even more rapidly. The country has banned new coal power stations for the time being; India, despite its rapidly growing demand for energy, has said it will not need to build any new coal power stations for at least three years.

Brazil now generates over 90 per cent of its mains electricity from renewables, while in Costa Rica, probably the world leader in renewables, months can now go by without any mains power being generated from fossil fuels.

The USA has also made huge strides in growing renewables capacity and seen emissions decline in recent years. In that context, the election of Donald Trump is, frankly, a worrying development for all concerned that the sinful human tendencies towards greed and deceit may cause irreparable damage to our God-given environment.

As with many other topics, President-Elect Trump does not seem to have reached a settled view on what he will do when he assumes the American Presidency in late January. His statements are often contradictory from one day to the next, sometimes even within the same interview.

At the time of writing, Mr Trump has claimed to be 'still open-minded', although previously he denounced climate change as a hoax perpetrated by the Chinese! If the USA reneges on its agreement, then it will be a test for the rest of the world to remain committed to Paris. Clean energy technology, however, will continue to advance.

Here in the UK, the overwhelming consensus among political leaders and the

general public reflects that of scientists: that climate change is a problem that we need to take real action to help avert. That's why I was delighted that the Prime Minister has given strong and public commitments that Britain will continue to tackle climate change after leaving the EU, and delighted that the UK completed the ratification process for the Paris Agreement so promptly.

Not all government policies, however, live up to the public statements. Government support for renewables, for example, has been slashed over the past 18 months just as we were making real progress.

Christians have a key role in keeping climate change on the political agenda, as we did with unpayable debt. Why not write to your MP to let him or her know that you believe climate change remains one of the most important issues facing the world today? Better yet, why not get together with other local churches in your area to meet your MP?

As well as campaigning, our prayers are vital. We will not make such a radical change in our behaviour in our own strength, without God's grace. You might consider fasting for the climate too. The Anglican Communion Bishops' statement on the environment suggested all Anglicans worldwide pray and fast on the first day of each month.

Pray and fast for the climate, a movement of Christians who do just that, started here but has spread internationally. Find out more at [www.prayandfastfortheclimate.org.uk](http://www.prayandfastfortheclimate.org.uk).

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## Anglicans worldwide: Being the hands and feet of Christ

**Anglican Life**  
**USPG**

For USPG, 2016 has been a year of standing firm in the face of changes and challenges in almost every country where we work.

We have seen political upheaval and many instances of man-made or natural disasters – but we have not been downcast because the gospel gives us hope. We find strength in our faith that God is willing and able to raise up the broken-hearted – and we have seen evidence of this on many occasions.

In Easter, we were horrified when a suicide bomb attack in a park in Lahore, Pakistan, claimed 75 lives and injured 340. One family is thought to have lost seven members in the blast, with only a 10-year-old boy surviving.

This happened just days after visiting

our partners in the Church of Pakistan, so we could not be there to mourn with them in person – but we stood in solidarity with our friends and, indeed, were inspired by their response to the tragedy: Christian joined Muslims and Hindus at the site of the attack, in Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park, and paid homage to victims of all faith and backgrounds.

It is only human to respond to such situations with feelings of hate and a desire to seek revenge, but despite their heartache, the church is committed to working for peace in partnership with other faith communities.

This Christ-like desire to seek peace and reconciliation and to never forget the most vulnerable is at the heart of our work with our partners.

It is almost impossible to imagine how our Anglican partners in Ethiopia

felt when cattle-raiders from South Sudan crossed into refugee settlement camps in Gambella where they killed 208 people and abducted 108 women and children (of whom most were thankfully subsequently returned). There are many Anglicans in these camps. In such circumstances, we might be tempted to question God's care – but far from it, our partners tell us that God is their only hope and source of strength.

Throughout 2016, we have been constantly inspired by the faith and practical care of our Anglican partners. While supporting them in this work, a big part of the mission of USPG is to share this faithfulness of the world church with Anglicans here.

We have seen our partners campaigning against human trafficking in Brazil and South Africa. We have sent

emergency grants to support Anglican partners facing flooding in Sri Lanka and famine in Malawi. We have funded practical support for refugees who are stranded in poorly serviced camps in Greece. And we have equipped a range of Anglican programmes in Bangladesh, Ghana, Zambia... the list goes on. Meanwhile, USPG staff in Britain have endeavoured to raise awareness about these challenges, call for prayer and raise funds to support this vital work.

As we enter 2017, USPG's resolution will be the same as it has been every year since we were founded in 1701: our mission is to stand alongside our Anglican partners around the world, to learn from them, and to encourage and equip our partners to keep on being the hands and feet of Christ in the communities they serve.

