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Commitment for Life

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

2023 | 24 Update



Olive tree saplings in Turmus Ayya Village, Ramallah.



For information about Commitment for Life, email commitmentforlife@urc.org.uk. You can also find out more at bit.ly/URCFLL or by calling 020 7916 8638.



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Commitment for Life, The United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT Tel 020 7691 9867

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Love in Action

Inspiring stories, news, and updates
to help you pray, act, and share.



Welcome

Commitment for Life was strongly represented recently at the biggest ever climate protest to be held in the UK. The event was organised by Extinction Rebellion, and supported by Christian Aid, Global Justice Now, War on Want, Rewilding Britain, the NHS workers, Tearfund, CAFOD, and a whole host of Churches, including the United Reformed Church.

Climate disruption affects everyone on the planet but has an exponentially adverse effect on our partners in the global south. Droughts, floods, and poor food production are going to get worse unless rich people and nations fundamentally change the way they behave. Every person's voice matters, and when we stand together, governments have to listen, even if doing so risks the profits of the wealthy to whom governments too often owe their allegiances.

We have so little time to act before runaway climate disruption becomes unavoidable. But there is hope! Thank you for all that you do in support of a world breaking through all our anxious uncertainties: a world characterised by peace, equality, and justice; a reality that Christians often call The Kingdom of God. Let's work and pray for our partners in Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, and the occupied Palestinian territory, and celebrate the good news stories we hear about in this Summer Booklet.

Kevin Snyman

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Christian Aid is the official relief, development and advocacy agency of 41 sponsoring churches in Britain and Ireland. We are a global movement of people who champion dignity, equality and justice worldwide.

Global Justice Now is a democratic social justice organisation. It's part of a global movement to challenge the powerful and create a more just and equal world. We mobilise people in the UK for change, and act in solidarity with those fighting injustice, particularly in the global South.

Commitment for Life encourages all United Reformed and Local Ecumenical Partnership churches to take action, pray and give for people living in poverty across the world. 75% of all income raised goes to Christian Aid to be divided equally among the partner countries, and 5% to Global Justice Now. The remaining 20% is spent on education, resources and administration.

Cover Image: Blessings Muzori harvesting resurrection bush as part of the wild product harvesting group.

Commitment
for Life



Was Jesus a Feminist?

A Bible Study by Kevin Snyman

Was Jesus a feminist? For some this question is hardly worth debating: of course Jesus was a feminist! For others, the question is disturbing.

Some officials in Russia are trying to categorise feminism as terrorism. In the UK one hears news reports almost weekly of the struggles that women are forced to endure in homes, in businesses, the CBI, and even in the NHS. Societies often justify the elevation of men by pointing to examples of male supremacy in the Bible. They see the Church as needing to uphold traditional family and societal values. But the Gospels tell a different story. Jesus subverted the expected norms of his day, especially about the place of women in society.

Throughout the Gospels, we notice how Jesus treats women as persons in their own right. Sarah Bessey in her book *Jesus Feminist* observes, "During his time on earth, Jesus subverted the social norms dictating how a rabbi spoke to women... He spoke to women directly, instead of through their male-headship standards and contrary to the order of the day".

Many patriarchal (or better still, kyriarchal) societies still see women as subservient to men. Here, women are viewed as God's "baby-making machines". Their primary value lies in birthing and raising children. Nicole Aschoff writes that the world's current economic system (i.e. capitalism) was developed under patriarchal assumptions. 'Sexism makes

women's unpaid labor in the home, which is essential to society, appear natural, a labor of love," she writes.

As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

The recent pandemic further demonstrated the fragility of the economic system, especially for poor people in the global south. COVID-19 highlighted the unjust and unequal access to healthcare. It tore back the veil on poverty, racism, environmental degradation, armed conflict, and increased domestic violence against women, according to Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri of the World Council of Churches.

If Jesus placed such high value on the place of women in society, and then went about subverting societal expectations, how are we subverting the norms of our societies in which women are suppressed, mocked, sexually harassed, starved, economically exploited, and murdered? Perhaps it begins by acknowledging that Jesus was a feminist, and then being determined to become feminists ourselves.

Transforming lives with sanitation solutions

Since 2017, nearly a million Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution in Myanmar have moved to Cox's Bazaar and the surrounding area, creating the largest refugee camp in the world.

Facilitating water, sanitation, and hygiene services in the refugee camps is a core focus of Christian Aid's humanitarian response. In Camp 15, the largest and most densely populated camp in Cox's Bazar, the organisation has installed a sewage treatment plant, repaired and installed latrines, wash cubicles, solar-run water points, and provided solid waste management, impacting the lives of nearly 71,360 people.

Being a hilly and densely populated area, Camp 15's demand for water is high. Christian Aid provides the water supply to four blocks through which around 9500 people access water. Every day, around 12000 -14000 litres of treated drinking water is supplied through the solar-run water system to residents.

To manage this water distribution, Christian Aid follows a 'Community-based distribution approach' to create ownership among the refugees. In each sub-block, user committees are formed comprising 5 members (all are women) to manage the water collection points. These committees manage the water



People collecting safe drinking water from a communal tap stand. Around 12,000 litres are supplied daily through the solar powered water distribution system.

distribution schedule, maintain the tap stands and spread awareness messages on waterborne diseases to the community. During COVID-19, these committees played a crucial role in managing the water networks and maintaining social distancing while collecting water.

Alongside the demand for water is the challenge of dealing with waste. The refugee crisis has led to a significant increase in the amount of solid waste generated in the camps which, without proper management, can cause environmental pollution and health hazards.

'I learned so much here, and I can utilize my own money to purchase food and necessary medications.'

To address this issue, Christian Aid established a solid waste management plant just in front of Camp 15. The plant is designed to handle up to 400 tons of waste per day and is equipped with modern technology for waste segregation, treatment, and disposal. The waste is first segregated into different categories: Organic waste is composted; recyclables are sold to local scrap dealers for cash by work volunteers; and non-recyclables are sent to a landfill site. The money generated from the recyclables is used by the volunteers to arrange awareness sessions with the community.

The plant employs 8 local Rohingya refugees including 4 women and 2 persons with disabilities who are trained in waste management techniques, providing them with a source of income and livelihood. Hasina Begum (pseudonym) is a widow with mobility impairment working as a cash-for-work volunteer in the waste management plant. Hasina says:

"I am a widow who has trouble getting around and has no other family members



Women working at a Solid Waste Management Plant in Camp 15.

to take care of me. I wanted to work despite constraints so that I could properly take care of my necessities. I'm grateful that DSK (a local partner of Christian Aid) allowed me to work here. I learned so much here, and I can utilize my own money to purchase food and necessary medications."

Around 1270 kg of compost fertilizer was manufactured from the collected waste and distributed for use in homestead gardening. Participants planted three gardening demonstration plots using the fertilizer, where they raised vegetables and sold them to nearby markets. This plant's goal is to become self-sustaining, and the community group will take charge of the plant.

The success of the waste management plant can serve as an example for other camps, demonstrating that sustainable waste management practices not only help to keep the environment clean but also provides economic opportunities for the local community.

Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory



Sheikhah Ahmad Rashaydeh, 86, from Rashaydeh.

Stand for peace with Palestinian and Israeli people

Since the beginning of 2022, more than 270 Palestinians and more than 30 Israelis have been killed due to escalating violence. Christian Aid warned in their report, *Where is Palestine?*, that the deep inequalities between Palestinians and Israelis threaten a further escalation of violence and loss of life if left unaddressed.

In a bid to galvanise action for peace among church leaders in the UK, more than 1,600 olive trees have been planted, one for each member of the General Synod and the Methodist Conference. Trees have also been planted for the Archbishop of Canterbury and other prominent church leaders. And every UK Member of Parliament has had a tree sponsored by Christian Aid.

In an Easter card to church leaders, the Chief Executive of Christian Aid Patrick Watt explains that olive trees are often mentioned in the Bible as “a source of basic livelihood and a symbol of peace.”

The olive trees, located in the Bethlehem area of the occupied Palestinian territory, have been planted by Palestinian farmers

“Violence, poverty and despair dominate so much of everyday life for Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory.”

as part of The Olive Tree Campaign. The project, led by Christian Aid’s partners East Jerusalem YMCA and the YWCA of Palestine are part of the Keep Hope Alive action for a peaceful future in Palestine for all.

Since 2001, thousands of mature olive trees belonging to Palestinian landowners and farmers have been uprooted in Gaza and the occupied West Bank as a result of military operations and the spread of Israeli settlements. The Olive Tree Campaign works with farmers who live under the threat of their lands and property being confiscated, providing sponsored trees to plant.

Sheikhah Ahmad Rashaydeh, 86 (pictured), is a farmer from Rashaydeh village in Bethlehem district. She has five daughters and two sons and owns 1.25 acres of land in the same village. In February 2022, the Olive Tree Campaign supported her with 50 olive trees, sponsored by international supporters to maintain her land.

Christian Aid is urging churches to support the Investing for Peace Campaign, which includes promoting a review of their investments and pension funds to ensure they do not invest directly or indirectly in firms that profit from occupation.

William Bell, Head of Middle East Policy & Advocacy at Christian Aid, said:

“Violence, poverty and despair dominate so much of everyday life for Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory.”

“The symbolic power of hope that comes with planting an olive tree should not be underestimated. It demonstrates a steadfastness of people determined to stay on their land.

“By gifting these trees, Christian Aid urges Church Leaders across the UK to stand with these farmers to build a just peace for all Palestinian and Israeli people.”

Commitment for Life has been giving, acting, and praying to work towards solutions for peace in Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories for over 20 years. You and your church can directly get involved with the Olive Tree Campaign at jai-pal.org



Mature olive trees in East Jerusalem.



Blessings Muzori harvesting Zumbani.

Diversifying our livelihood saved our marriage

Life was difficult for 51-year-old Blessings Muzori and her family in Kazingizi Village, Mutoko.

When the family farm began struggling, her husband moved to the city to find work. "Things were hard" remembers Blessings, "we were living hand-to-mouth and had to wait for provisions to be sent from my husband. This created a lot of conflicts between us. I found life really tough – doing everything on my own, trying to get something out of the land in such an unpredictable climate. When I managed to harvest something, I couldn't get decent prices".

Blessings tells how things changed for herself and the wider community with the coming of the BRAC project. "One of the first things the project taught us was how to see the community and the land differently. We were taught about disaster risk management, and this helped us plan what we need to do in case of droughts and other challenges such as price fluctuations. The climate smart agriculture training made us realise we can use less fertilisers, farm without cattle to help us plough and still get a harvest even when the rainfall was low. We can also grow feed for our livestock in our fields and make hay for the cattle and goats. This was all completely new to us."

Blessings joined an Internal Savings and Loans group as part of the project. The group's 14 members come together to discuss projects to invest their group savings in and work together to achieve group goals. "We did not actually know each other before the project but since we formed the group, we have become best friends." The group put a proposal forward to the BRAC project to run an oil pressing business for sunflower, soya and peanut oil and they have just received the machinery. The group paid 30% and the project contributed 70% as well as helping the group secure a stand at the local business centre. They intend to build a permanent structure to house the press and run the business which they estimate will make the group at least USD200 per month.

Blessings also belongs to a group that harvests wild products from the forests and hills in the area. They collect a wide range of products at different times of the year including resurrection bush and zumbani, both of which fetch a premium as herbal tea. In the first year, when the rains were good, she made USD120 harvesting the plants as well as wild fruits and nuts, selling them to buyers linked to the BRAC project.

'BRAC has strengthened peoples' relationships and now we help each other.'

Blessings's husband has now moved back to the rural home and is now an equal partner in all the various activities. The couple

are getting on very well and the family are much more positive about life in general. "We no longer have quarrels in our house. We are doing these projects together. My husband is happy to be home and sharing the workload." Blessings has also noticed a change in the community. "Since BRAC came along, we are all much busier with our projects. We visit each other in the fields and exchange ideas about new projects and farming methods. BRAC has strengthened peoples' relationships and now we help each other more".



Blessings and her sister processing sunflower oil using the group oil press.

Interview with Christian Aid CEO - Patrick Watt



Please introduce yourself and your role

I'm Patrick Watt and I'm the chief executive of Christian Aid. I started in this role in May 2022.

What inspired you to pursue a career in this sector?

Ultimately, I came into the sector because I wanted to help make the world a better place. I wanted to do something purposeful with my life and I felt that as a Christian I had a responsibility to put time and energy into helping to tackle the injustice of poverty.

In what ways does your Christian faith shape your work?

First of all, it gives me motivation to keep going and to have hope for the future. I hope it also shapes how I do my work and how I interact with other people. And I'd like to think that it helps put my failures and my successes into perspective because, if nothing else, being a Christian is about recognizing that in the final analysis, we're

not in control and that what we are able to do, we are doing with God's grace.

In your time working at Christian Aid, what are the achievements you're especially proud of?

I'm really proud of the way in which the organization has responded to the crises in Ukraine and more recently, the earthquake in Syria and Turkey. I think that has been Christian Aid at its best - making a practical difference to people in moments of extreme need while also mobilizing with its churches and supporters in prayer and campaign action on the underlying causes of humanitarian emergencies.

I've been proud too of the way which we've been able to refocus on partnerships, putting more of our funding into working with civil society organizations in the countries in which we support programmes. And of the way which we were able to help influence a loss and damage fund that was agreed at the UN Climate Summit in Egypt last December.

For me, these are all examples of Christian Aid taking risks, of responding to both the symptoms of poverty and the underlying causes, and of harnessing its relationship with supporters and churches to bring about real change.

Do you have a message for the churches and individuals that have supported the work of Christian Aid through commitment for life?

The first thing I'd want to say is a huge 'thank you' for the very generous giving



Jen Bishop, a pigeon pea farmer in Malawi, collects water near her home.

through Commitment for Life, and the way that has then enabled us to tackle the injustice of poverty. I'd also emphasise the important role of churches and individual churchgoers in speaking out, and advocating for justice: the prayer and voice of our supporters is hugely important. But most of all, I feel a deep gratitude for the steadfast way in which churches participating in Commitment for Life of have stood by Christian Aid over many years, including when it was difficult to sustain that support.

What would be some prayer points for Christian Aid?

Prayers that God would strengthen us in our work. Prayers for the people with whom we work, who are affected in their daily lives by poverty. Prayers for the thousands of volunteers up and down the country who support the work of Christian Aid and make it possible. Prayers for the people of Malawi, particularly the women farmers featured in our Christian Aid Week appeal who are growing climate resilient crops, often contending with very tough

conditions. Malawi was recently struck by another major tropical storm a year on from Cyclone Ana, causing a lot of damage to agricultural areas. And prayers for the work we're doing in rebel held areas of NW Syria that have been affected by the earthquake: communities that have received a lot less international support than on the Turkish side of the border, and who in many cases have already been displaced by fighting in other parts of the country.

Any final thoughts you would like to share?

In many ways what we're trying to do is very simple. This doesn't mean it's easy - often simple tasks are the most difficult to achieve. We're trying to make a tangible difference in the lives of people in poverty by connecting them, through programmes and campaigns, with the compassion and generosity of Christians in Britain. I think that as long as we listen to the needs and priorities of people living in poverty and work in close partnership with our sponsoring churches, we won't go very far wrong.

Could you be a transformative church?



An encounter with Jesus saw one time tax cheat, Zacchaeus, make restitution to those he'd swindled.

A simple conversation over dinner led to an incredible transformation. Reading this story today, in the middle of a climate crisis, I'm asking myself: who is the church speaking to, and what kind of transformation could we see as a result?

Today climate vulnerable countries, those least responsible for the crisis, are experiencing the worst impacts. The loss and damage of the crisis is driven by the most polluting countries and companies. Could an encounter with the Jesus following church see polluters pay up for the damage they've done?

I believe the answer is yes! Will you rise up and use your voice to influence fossil fuel companies and the UK Government.

We can't all get an appointment at Number 10 Downing Street, or with the boss of Shell, but we can talk to our local MPs. At Christian Aid, we want to see transformative encounters. Those on the frontlines of the climate crisis and calling for compensation. We need churches here in the UK to meet with their local MPs and call for the UK Government to make polluters pay up for the climate damages they've caused.

As Ugandan climate justice activist, Vanessa Nakate reminds us "In a time of crises, we must reveal the heart of Christ. We must reveal the love of God. We must reveal His grace towards humanity. We must use our voices. We must stand by our values and do something for communities on the frontline of the climate crisis."

You can find resources for your church to take action at caid.org.uk/riseuppayup

Greta says 'No to Fossil Fuels'



'What are fossil fuels?'

Fossil fuels are things like coal, oil, or natural gas. These are formed from dead plants and animals, or fossils. Fossils are made of carbon. The earth stores all that carbon in the ground. This process takes millions of years.

Humans dig up these fossil fuels to make petrol, diesel, oil, and gas. We use these fuels day-to-day for our vehicles and to provide electricity in our homes.

However, the carbon that is burned and pushed into the air badly affects the environment. Carbon dioxide in the air traps the sun's heat. It creates acid rain and causes the oceans to warm up. Glaciers begin to melt. Growing food is affected by drought and flooding. Our brothers and sisters in the poorest communities in the world are suffering the most, and that is unfair.

In Psalm 24 verse 1 the psalmist says, 'The earth and everything in it belongs to God.' We are called to look after God's creation. We must act in ways that will restore and protect the environment. I wonder how can you play your part in looking after God's creation?

How can you help?

There are several ways in which you can say 'No to Fossil Fuels':

- If possible, walk or cycle to school rather than taking the car. Use public transport.
- Ask the adults to the heating down by 1 degree, then install solar panels.

- Turn off electrical devices when they are not being used.
- Reduce the amount of plastic and try to avoid using single use plastic.
- Buy second hand toys and clothes. Don't always buy the newest phone or game console.
- Think about where to spend your holidays – don't use aeroplanes.
- Switch off the tap when cleaning your teeth.
- Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle, and support Christian Aid and Commitment for Life.
- Get your grown-up carer to sign the petition at globaljustice.org.uk/our-campaigns/climate to tell big polluters to pay for their climate damage.

Prayer Activity: carbon footprint

Our carbon footprint is the amount of carbon dioxide released into the air because of our energy needs. Draw around your foot, and on it write down all the ways in which you can help Greta by saying 'No to Fossil Fuels.'

Say a prayer thanking God for his creation. Pray that all the big polluters will pay compensation to those who are affected in the world and will stop using fossil fuels.

Making polluters pay!



Rich countries in the global north have contributed far more to the climate crisis than those in the global south. Around 92% of the carbon emissions that are in excess of safe planetary limits come from those rich countries.

Despite this, countries in the global south are already experiencing the worst impacts of climate change, including hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of economic damage each year (predicted to rise to over \$1 trillion a year by 2050).

To address those impacts they are also getting loans that further trap their economies in poverty. This is a clear injustice. In response, social justice movements and governments from across the global south have, for decades, called on rich countries to compensate them for this damage. At the UN COP27 climate summit last November, these demands

were finally met with the agreement to set up a loss and damage fund.

Who should pay?

The fossil fuel-driven development of the global north is responsible for the climate chaos devastating climate vulnerable countries like Pakistan, Mozambique and island nations year after year.

The Big Five oil companies (Chevron, ExxonMobil, BP, Shell and TotalEnergies) have played a particularly big role in this, contributing over 11% of global historic carbon emissions between them. For decades, these companies have known the impacts of their operations on the planet and the communities where they operate. They've denied that climate change is real, paid lobbyists to cover up their role and carried on profiting from the destruction they continue to create.

These companies have always made huge profits, even more so during the current cost of living crisis. The Big Five made nearly \$200 billion in profits between them in 2022. So they can afford to pay. And they should pay a lot. Based on their historic emissions, each of the Big Five could owe around \$500 billion to \$2.2 trillion between now and 2050 to pay their fair share of the costs of tackling climate change. Ultimately, we need a world without fossil fuels, but forcing the energy giants to pay for the devastation they've wreaked is an important step. The super-profits they're already making from oil and gas extraction cannot be allowed to go into the pockets of wealthy shareholders or be reinvested in further fossil fuel development.

Fossil fuel corporations are becoming increasingly unpopular, with this government levying windfall taxes on them. We now need to build that pressure to ensure inadequate windfall taxes become substantial polluter taxes. Winning a loss and damage fund at the UN wasn't easy – the climate justice movement and global south countries had to overcome the long-running opposition of rich country governments. Now Global Justice Now and others are working to ensure this fund is filled by polluter taxes ahead of COP28 this autumn.

Pray With Us

Pray for Zimbabwe

1. Pray for peaceful and fair elections in Zimbabwe for this year's general elections.
2. Pray for resources for Christian Aid Zimbabwe as they work on Climate Change, Livelihood resilience and Gender Equality
3. Pray that God would avert the Cholera outbreak that is looming in the country with cases rising steadily by the day.
4. Pray for Christian Aid Zimbabwe staff members – for protection, wisdom, strength to do the work and team cohesion.

Pray for IOPT

1. Pray for the work of Christian Aid and its partners as they seek equality and justice for Palestinians and Israelis.
2. Pray for an end to violence and the de-escalation of tensions across IOPT.
3. Pray for the safety for our partner staff as they work.
4. Pray for wisdom and compassion in the hearts of the political and social leaders to see a just peace realised in IOPT

Pray for Bangladesh

1. Pray for Christian Aid Bangladesh staff members as they work on Humanitarian Response, Economic Justice and Gender Equality in the country.
2. Pray for the elimination of gender-based inequalities and the work of developing women in leadership in Civil Society Organizations in Bangladesh.
3. Pray for the humanitarian support work of Christian Aid with the Rohingya refugees and the severely disaster affected population.
4. Pray for climate resilience and climate justice in Bangladesh.