

Bishop Martin Seeley writes...

We are very good at leaving things until it is almost too late. Let's not do it with our planet – because then it really will be.

It is very easy to put off the actions that are for our own good, because they seem difficult in the short term.

It's part of our human condition, I might even say, our sinful state, that we hold on to ways of life that are harming us, even killing us, because to change seems worse – until it is almost, or maybe it is, too late.

We did this with the pandemic. “It's in China... it won't affect *us*.” And then it came to Europe, so “It's terrible in Italy...but it won't affect *us*.”

We may not have actually said that, but that is how we seemed to behave. And I say “we” because there were few who were calling for aversive and protective action early on.

Not until we moved into March last year and the situation came home to more and more people did the pressure mount to act.

And we now know with hindsight if actions had been taken sooner, many, many lives would have been saved.

But putting our heads in the sand seemed the easiest thing to do – until the real danger, and just how overwhelming this would be, began to dawn on us.

Once we started to take actions and the Government acted, then what may have been cynicism or even hopelessness turned into engagement and hope.

When we do act in situations like this, hope emerges.

And it is just the same with the climate crisis. As the COP26 Global Climate Conference begins in Glasgow, we – and governments – can keep our heads in the sand (not noticing that the sand is getting drier and hotter!) or we can act.

We can be cynical or hopeless, avoiding or overwhelmed by the huge crisis, or we can act and find hope.

We can, as we did with the pandemic, think it just happens somewhere else.

I recently came across an “interactive” map produced by Climate Central, an organisation that reports on climate science.

The map shows what parts of the world could be threatened with the rising sea levels, and the associated storm surges, with continuing global temperature increases.

If we think that is just about other places, we only need to look on the map at what could happen to parts of our Suffolk coast, to Norfolk and Cambridgeshire.

We can't just wait until the shores are lapping at our front door, because the climate impact has been affecting the world for a very long time, and it will be too late.

Acting now is what is needed.

We have plenty of evidence of the poorest in our world suffering from the already devastating effects of the climate crisis.

In our own sister Church in the diocese of Kagera, Tanzania, east Africa, the rains have become increasingly unpredictable and much less. Crops can be planted when the rain starts, but then it suddenly stops and the crops wither and die. And the change in climate means pests and diseases are now attacking banana and cassava plants.

This is happening across the world, so the crisis is upon us and we cannot delay actions, before it overwhelms us.

Which is why so many people are acting, and taking strong actions now, discovering of course that when you act, hopelessness turns to hope.

Christians and people of other faiths are acting because we have a responsibility to care for God's creation and we can see starkly now how we have contributed to its destruction.

And we are acting because we are committed to justice – justice for the poor whose livelihoods are being destroyed now.

This June the Church of England in Suffolk committed to reach net zero carbon by 2030 for all its buildings, including churches, houses and schools.

Many churches across Suffolk have joined the “Eco-Church” initiative to work for environmental sustainability.

Many other organisations and our councils have made, and are making, similar commitments.

I learned recently that the University of Suffolk are committed to net zero carbon emissions by 2030 from both the combustion of fuels, such as in heating or in vehicles, and from the indirect emissions from the purchase of grid supplied electricity. And they are well on track to achieving that.

And of course strong support for this, and for stronger actions, comes from the students themselves, who like so many young people are spurring the rest of us to face up to the reality that is upon us.

The National Union of Students has recently created “Students Organising for Sustainability” to lead students’ response to the climate crisis.

We need to be ready to face up to deeper changes that will have to happen to our lifestyle and our economy - and those will be tough. But that is how we will survive and enable others to survive.

Just as with the pandemic, if we wait too long, the toll will be massive. If we together speak and act now, we may just, together, avoid catastrophe.

And when we take actions, and our Government takes actions, the hopelessness turns to hope.

When we start to live with the grain of creation, when we turn from harming creation and ourselves, we live the way God has been calling us to all along.