# **Templeton-funded Equipping Religious Leaders in an Age of Science project**

# St Mary’s, Honley & St George’s, Brockholes

# Water of Life: our faith and a changing climate

Report of one day conference held at University of Huddersfield on 9th March 2017

Programme

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| 10:00 | Opening prayers | Bishop Jonathan Gibbs |
| Welcome to Huddersfield University - Professor Michael Clarke, Dean School of Music, Humanities & Media | | |
| 10:10-10:20 | Introduction to the conference | Professor Richard Ashley  St Mary’s Church Honley |
| 10:20-10:40 | The context: A theological perspective on human responsibility for the natural world | The Rt Revd Dr Jonathan Gibbs Bishop of Huddersfield |
| Morning session – The Science | | |
| 10:40 – 11:00 | The challenge of the changing UK climate | Daniel Johns UK Committee on Climate Change |
| 11:00 – 11:15 | Getting the most from the Holme Valley and the River Holme | Kim Warren  River 2015 |
| 11:15 -11:30 | Holmfirth, climate change and being more sustainable | Janet Williams  Holmfirth Transition Towns |
| 11:30 – 11:45 | Coffee break | |
| 11:45 – 12:15 | How to respond to increasing flood risk | Mary Dhonau OBE Hon DSc Hon RICS  Chair of The Flood Protection Group Property Care Association  Chief Executive of the Know Your Flood Risk Campaign |
| 12:15 – 12:35 | Carnival Capital? Turning the world upside down: flood disasters as catalysts for social change | Dr Julia Meaton  University of Huddersfield |
| 12:35 –  12:50 | Questions from the morning session | |
| Afternoon session 1 – faith and climate change – God’s creation | | |
| 13:30 – 14:40 | Faith based presentations | * Revd. Helen Roberts   Trinity and United Reformed church   * Revd. Keith Griffin   Upper Holme Valley Anglican Churches   * Jemima Parker   Leeds Diocesan Environment Officer   * Revd. Liam Beadle   St Mary’s Honley & St George’s Brockholes |
| 14:40 - 15:10 | Tea and coffee break | |
| Afternoon session 2 – bringing science and faith together | | |
| 15:10- 15:40 | Q & A with Panel discussion |  |
| 15:40-16:00 | Where to next? | Professor Richard Ashley |
| 16:00 | Closing prayers | The Revd Liam Beadle |

The Templeton Foundation science and faith programme seeks to help churches develop a deeper engagement with science, theologically, pastorally or in mission. Projects must be locally based and demonstrate high-level support from church leadership, and involve science professionals. “Our aim is to change attitudes within the church and, thereby, positively to influence the public conversation about the science-religion relationship.”

The conference set out to consider how to further understanding of science and faith in the context of climate change and the River Holme catchment. To seek a way forward to take us on to the next phase of outreach and partnerships to explore together the issues: For those of faith – a strengthening and an understanding that there is no contradiction between science and faith. Also to bring a call to action – whatever that is for us personally and in our communities:

Are you or those around you worried about how much the world is changing? All round us we see threats from changes in society and our environment. People of faith should look to the future with hope and joy. We know that God is with us and we need to trust in Him. This conference is intended to support people of faith and the wider community to look to the future with hope through better understanding of nature and what our faith tells us about God’s love for the world and all that is in it. Water of Life is a one year Templeton Foundation funded project that focuses on dialogue and actions to deepen understanding and build hope and trust in God in religious congregations and all people of faith. We will consider humanity’s role in the opportunities brought from the changing climate and the consequences for the people living and working near the River Holme.

This free, one-day conference brings together scientific experts with people of faith and experts to set out the background to the challenges, opportunities and appropriate responses to a changing climate with particular focus on the River Holme valley. Speakers from the scientific world, from the River Holme charity, presenting best practice responses to flood risks, are complemented by Christian, Muslim and other faith-based speakers setting out how people of faith should see climate and other changes and their role in responding to the opportunities presented in the context of God’s love.

The ethos of the Water of Life (WoL) is: “As people of faith we should look to the future with hope and joy. Yet all around us we see threats from changes in society and our environment. How, in this context can we change our mindsets to be people of hope?” To address the challenge this sets, we are looking at changes in the world Climate; people,

and the secularisation of our society – where ‘science’ is seen as ‘truth’. How do we strengthen our trust in God in the face of such change? River Holme is the focus as a linear thread providing a theme – changing river, with both lower and higher flows in the future – but moving as people of faith from feeling threatened to a place of hope in God’s love.

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| The River Holme joins the River Colne in Huddersfield | Flood risk areas in Brockholes within the Parish of St Mary’s and St George’s |

The conference aimed to set down some of the key building blocks on which to build the project.

Following introductions from Professor Michael Clarke, Dean School of Music, Humanities & Media and Professor Richard Ashley, the **Rt Revd Dr Jonathan Gibbs** provided an outline for a theological framework, set out below.

1. God exists as a community of love between 3 inter-dependent persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
2. God created the universe as an expression of that love and out of a desire to share himself with other beings that could enjoy and respond to that love.
3. Human beings are called in a particular way to receive, enjoy and reflect that love.
4. Human beings, however, have rejected that invitation and chosen instead to live for themselves, with disastrous consequences.
5. God chose to come into our world in the person of The Son in order to reconcile human beings to Himself and to inaugurate His Kingdom here on earth – which shows us “Life as it is meant to be”.
6. Jesus Christ calls human beings to participate in the life of His kingdom through the power of the Holy Spirit; the fellowship of those who respond to His call is the Church.
7. God is at work in the world as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.
8. We learn to respond to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and are called to participate in what God is doing in the world. That is part of what it means for us to be the “image of God” here on earth.
9. Responding to God as Creator means both acknowledging the goodness of all that God has made and exercising governance over Creation. In terms of the Genesis story, this weaves together the idea of dominion from Genesis 1:26 and of “tending and caring” from Genesis 2:15.
10. Christians are called to live in the world as citizens of the Kingdom of God – exercising dominion and care in and for the world as citizens of God’s Kingdom. We learn to do this through responding to God the Redeemer and Jesus Christ and to God the Sanctifier through the Holy Spirit.
11. The particular form that life should take will depend on the cultural and social context in which we find ourselves – one size does not fit all.

Some faith groups partially withdraw from the world, but as Christians, we are called to live in and from the world. In a number of countries/cultures words for man and earth are almost identical. We need to seek the wellbeing of fellow citizens and of the planet. Hence the Church should encourage stewardship and resist exploitation. As Christians we should fulfil the need to spread good news and be confident in sharing with others of faith and none. We need to find ways to allow the Holy Spirit to move us on as we respond to God the Creator and Redeemer – never allowing us to ‘sit still’; but changing our orientation away from what to do – focusing on life outside of the Church including creation – some Christians wrongly think that all that matters is their relationship with God because in any case the Earth will be destroyed in the fullness of time. We need to ask questions about the correct use of the world’s resources and their impacts (e.g. Fairtrade).

The scientific context was outlined in terms of one of our greatest challenges, the climate change and implications of this for us. UK Climate Change Risk Assessment: Evidence Report

Was outlined by **Daniel Johns**, head of Adaptation, Committee on Climate Change [www.theccc.org.uk].

The synthesis report that sets out priorities for the five years from 2017 was outlined:

1. 2016 was confirmed as the world’s warmest year on record, the third record warmest year in a row.
2. Area of Arctic sea ice in summer has shrunk by around half in the past forty years.
3. UK land and sea surface temperatures have warmed by ~1oC, record highs for both in 2014.
4. Heavy rainfall is on the increase, particularly in western and northern UK areas.
5. There have been several “Once in a lifetime” floods in England since 2000
6. UK average sea level has risen by 15cm since 1900.
   1. Climate change is happening here and its happening now
   2. The ~1oC warming to date has already affected weather patterns, including in the UK
   3. The Paris Agreement means 4-6oC of warming is less likely
   4. But further changes in the UK climate (and sea level rise) are inevitable
   5. Severe, pervasive and irreversible changes in climate cannot be ruled out.
7. Responding
   1. Improving protection for some communities will be possible whilst others will face the prospect of significantly increased risks.
   2. This will affect property values, business revenues and in extreme cases the viability of communities.
   3. Risks to communities and local economies are closely linked to the resilience of local infrastructure, in particular energy, transportation and communications systems.
   4. Warming of 4oC or more implies inevitable increases in flood risk across all UK regions even in the most ambitious adaptation scenarios considered.
8. Six priority areas for the next National Adaptation Programme, with greatest risks in descending order:
   1. Flood and coastal change risks
   2. Risks to health, wellbeing and productivity due to increasing temperatures
   3. Risks of water shortages for wide range of needs
   4. Risks to natural capital (stocks of natural resources including land)
   5. Risks to food production both nationally and internationally
   6. New and emerging pests and diseases.
9. Responses encompass:
   1. Actions with no/low regrets (i.e. don’t commit to doing things that we could regret later).
   2. Factor climate change into decisions that create ‘lock-in’ (big structures mean that these have to be utilised even if it is realised with new knowledge that they are no longer what is needed).
   3. Prepare now for long-term risks and impacts (this was flagged up by Sir Michael Stern in 2006).
10. Some people of faith believe that as God is in charge then we need do nothing, just await God’s will; others with/without faith believe that humankind has always adapted via evolutionary processes and hence this will come about naturally.

Bringing these perspectives to the local area, the River Holme valley, **Kim Warren** of River 2015 (now River Home Connections: https://www.riverholmeconnections.org/) talked about getting the most from the Holme Valley and the River Holme. Kim spoke about the catchment based approach to how the River should be managed and how the charity is engaging with people and the River tackling invasive species and helping young people in particular in forest learning.

**Janet Williams** also presented a local initiative, the Holmfirth Transition Town (HoTT: <http://hott.org.uk/)>. Transition means moving from a high carbon way of living to a lower carbon way. HoTT seek to move towards a sustainable way of living in the Holme Valley, a way that does not use more of finite resources than absolutely necessary. Houses and vehicles both release carbon emissions, so HoTT focus on energy saving at home, on generating renewable energy and on sustainable travel. With some 200 members Holmfirth is now one of 1200 transition towns around the world. Activities include providing information, films, discussions, quizzes and organising Bright Green Energy Shows and Energy Trails to illustrate worthwhile action. HoTT provide an Affordable Warmth scheme with draught proofing and thermal curtain lining - especially to older & sick people and young families. Their community wind turbine in collaboration with Longley Farm,

now offsets some 286 tonnes of CO2 per year. Transport initiatives include in collaboration with River Holme Connections, developing a safe cycle route along the River to encourage more cycling. HoTT also hold public meetings with the transport authorities to make the case for improved local public transport and have set up The Bright Green Community Trust, which offers Valley residents grants of up to £2,000 to set up low carbon, green projects. Many Transition Towns emphasise the importance of nature and growing food locally. Vegetables and fruit are fresher and the “food miles” are far fewer. HoTT’s newest project is learning from Incredible Edible in Todmorden [https://www.incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk/] and planting vegetables in our Holmfirth’s flower beds.

What it is like to be flooded several times was the theme of **Mary Dhonau’s** presentation. From this she has developed a personal expertise for responding that has now become national and international leading guidance: What is it like to be flooded? How can we plan, prepare &mitigate against it at a Property level?

1. Floods can destroy communities
2. But mainly people’s lives
3. When media and political interest dies down many are left for years in temporary and inadequate living accommodation; many of these had no insurance to help rebuild their lives
4. Know your flood risk:
   1. An average of 67% of respondents to a recent YouGov survey, commissioned by the Know Your Flood Risk Campaign, reported that they had never checked the flood risk level of their home (69% in Yorkshire and Humber).
   2. Only 20% of people check flood risks before moving into a new home
   3. Know your flood risk campaigns – and free recovery guides available via Mary Dhonau Associates [http://www.marydhonau.co.uk/].
   4. Also a 4 step guide to preparing a household emergency plan
   5. The Environment Agency has a free online flood warning service
   6. Communities are starting to take their own action – telecommunication systems using e.g. mobile phones; making sure that permeable paved areas are used not tarmac
   7. There is no such thing as being 100% safe. Even with flood defences, these will fail at some point. Be ready for this.
   8. Sandbags are useless and with planning need never be used, there are lots of more effective systems
   9. Make sure your property has closing orifices – e.g. air brick covers, non-return drain valves
   10. Use combinations of resistance (keeping water out) and resilience measures (be able to recover rapidly) – see belowFlood house annotated.pdf

**Dr Julia Meaton** of the University of Huddersfield outlined her hypothesis that major disasters provide opportunities for change in Carnival Capital? Turning the world upside down: flood disasters as catalysts for social change. The term ‘carnival’, emerged from the medieval religious celebration, the ‘Feast of Fools’ – in which hierarchical orders are upturned with everyone participating without being chained to or defined by their positions within a society, group, or organisation. In this, voices normally peripheral, suppressed or unheard, become vibrant and visual. Hence accepted truths, beliefs and norms are challenged, challenging authority and hegemony, thus can be a vehicle for cultural and political change. Citing the example of the aftermath of the boxing day 2015 floods in Hebden Bridge, Muslim and Sikh caterers from Bradford, Slough and Birmingham, Brownies helping with tea and refreshments, Street Entertainers, External Individual Volunteers, The Trades Club, The Town Hall all provided unplanned assistance. Assistance from Muslim organisations was very notable: Slough-based Khalsa Aid serving hot food for free to hundreds of people; Human Relief Foundation from Bradford - helped residents, cleaned houses and even helped clear a flooded cricket ground; Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association UK came up from London to aid clean up; Muslim Hands, and other communities from all over the UK to help out ‘whenever, however, to do whatever’: ““out of this devastation, people of all religions, people of all ethnicities have really really come together as one and restored communities and my faith in humanity. The Muslim community have helped the Christian community, the Indian community have helped the atheist community - no matter what everyone's beliefs are, you have all come together as one”. Even bikers, often seen as threatening, in alliance with the police: ““We spread out and go wherever needed. The police understood what we were doing. We are not there to offer anything physical. We just show our faces. Obviously we are not vigilantes. A lot of us are quite big, chunky lads, so that helps. We don’t have to really say anything, just turn up”.

However, not all post-flood interactions were so positive. Meaton terms such behaviours as sacrilegious’: For virtually every disaster there are those who seek to profit, looting and thieving: “The selfish and criminal behaviour of a few should be seen not as the only true expression of human nature, but rather, as the desperate actions of terrified people suddenly deprived of their familiar vital supports.” It is not only these thieves, but also the media who indulge in voyeuristic and sacrilegious behaviour in filming victims, peddling untruths and showing a voyeuristic, self-serving detachment in times of upheaval. The sacrilegious perspective can also be applied to the inadequacies of government and their agencies (e.g. The Environmental Agency).

The carnival perspective helps understand that new actors can operate in a social space unfamiliar to themselves and to the rest of the community. It is not clear as yet if community responses can ever be built in to formal disaster and emergency planning and this is an area of ongoing research.

The Diocesan Environment Officer, **Jemima Parker** described how we were aspiring to be an Eco Diocese through 3 threads: Measuring our emissions; Making reductions; Message of hope enacted. Carbon calculator, the Diocesan Green Energy Saving Scheme for churches. For 109 Churches who have joined the Green Journey, the average annual carbon reduction has been some 2 tonnes (equivalent to 6,000 car miles or a return flight to Sydney), with average annual savings per church of £775 and an average VAT rebate (one off) of £940 (for the 40 churches who were being over charged). These initiatives are enacting a message of hope – in WoL we need to see how best can we enact a message of hope in the Holme Valley?

Following the ‘science’ presentations and in the light of the community initiative presented, the conference returned to faith, with three personal presentations by **Revd Helen Roberts** (a scientist), **Revd Keith Griffin** and **Revd Liam Beadle**. Helen spoke about her personal journey of science and faith and Liam talked about water in the Bible. Keith quoted Annie Heppenstall saying that, “‘the Church’ seems a bit bewildered on the whole by the outdoors.” Most church buildings are closed off from the outside and few have windows that are clear so that the outdoors is included in the indoors. Scant attention is given to the actual outdoors in sermons about Jesus’ spending much of his time in the open, in the wilderness and on the mountains and the Jesus who compared himself to living water. In the psalms we read, “Let everything that has breath, praise the LORD!” (150.6). What if it’s primarily the animals and birds which offer praise and we’re invited to join in? Maybe the mountains and forests too? Doesn’t nature teach us about God? Doesn’t a closer proximity with creation help us to see Christ from fresh angles? One initiative is Forest Church, which isn’t about going out into nature, as something separate and distinct from us. The plan is always to let the boundaries fade, the barriers drop, and simply to spend some time with nature. It isn’t about doing what we do in church outside, although sometimes we can make space for prayer and we can read scripture.

“Most of the time, I don’t feel I get it right in leading these sessions, because far too much still depends on words and me talking. My ignorance of the natural world is exposed. But what we need to learn is to let nature speak. And nature speaks only when it wants to, on its own terms.

As adults, we need to learn how to slow down and listen. Children are good in a group like this, because they can do it naturally and teach the grown-ups about how to connect with nature.

With all the problems of people not taking enough interest in climate change, failing to change their ways – people like you and me – isn’t this the issue? Where we stand in relation to nature. How we see ourselves as part of God’s creation. A spiritual issue. It may be that we don’t require more books, more campaigns, more conferences. As Marcel Proust said, “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.”

A Q&A panel after the presentations helped the audience with understanding the issues and opportunities. Forward activities planned in the WoL project were outlined and the way forward informed from the conference. New ideas that emerged were to engage with the stewardship schemes for the River Holme and also with the horticulture being pursued by HoTT, but selecting local areas in Honley for this.