The “Heineken” effect; reaching the parts that others cannot reach

Rev Ruth Newton

On 8th July General Synod debated a motion to strengthen the Church of England’s response to climate change and other environmental issues, at national and diocesan levels. Rev Ruth Newton, Area Environment Champion for Ripon South, spoke in favour of the motion from her own experience in her parish. Read her speech below or watch Rev Ruth Newton’s speech starting at 2.25 here [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdG00e400-I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdG00e400-I)

I am speaking to raise my concern that work in this area has hitherto been under-resourced.

I am aware that the Church does not have limitless funds which means that hard choices need to be made, priorities agreed and stewardship applied.

There is much deserving of support, children and young people, disability awareness, the “missing generation” safeguarding, digital evangelism; you can make up your own wish list I’m sure. Against such a background resourcing environmental programmes can be seen as one priority amongst many, but this afternoon we have heard about the urgency of the environmental crisis we are facing. All that we know about the problems facing our world suggests that the environment is the priority for us. (The Archbishop of Canterbury told us it was the first priority of the global primates). It is a question of survival, a question of justice, a question of advocating for the poorest in our world; is a question of intergeneration justice and of evangelism. It is core business!

Looking where we put our money and who we chose to employ shows what matters to us. We are putting our money where our mouth is regarding disinvestment and we need to be putting where our mouth is in terms of resourcing environment programmes.

We should do this because it is quite simply the right thing to do but it is also a case of seeking first the Kingdom of God and finding we have everything else added. I speak from the perspective of being blessed by my Church’s engagement with a biodiversity project and with Eco-Church, and extensively supported by Leeds DEO Jemima Parker.

Our project is based on the idea that Our Church yard, which is managed for biodiversity acts as an ark for vulnerable species whose habitat is scarce.

The results have been positive and far reaching. First it has had the “Heineken” effect; reaching the parts that others cannot reach. It has enthused young people allowing us to nurture the next generation of leaders. One aspect of the project has been managed by two under twenty fives who have harnessed young funding to enable awareness weeks to take place.

The school has had “Churchyard weeks” which have included bug hunts, and moth counts but also teaching about a Christian understanding of what happens when we die.
Groups for people with disabilities have joined us both to enjoy the area and help manage it.

We have gained credibility and earned the right to speak with authority in the public arena as academics, wildlife professionals, charities and the local council have worked with us and sought our help.

We have made the connections and sparked the curiosity necessary for pre-evangelism and our social capital has increased as we are seen as altruistic and not self-serving.

Although our work was primarily in the area of biodiversity rather than climate justice I believe the opportunities presented are the same.

Opportunities to engage meaningfully with those who have, up until now, found Christianity irrelevant or even immoral.

Opportunities to speak coherently and with a united voice on an ethical issues of global significance around which we can build a diverse coalition of people of faiths and none.

Opportunities to be leaders in working for the common good of all humanity.

I would like you to support the motion. I would like you to see money spent on environmental programmes and DEOs as money well spent. I would like you to prioritise environmental engagement in your parish, diocesan and national budgets.

Everything has a cost and there is a cost to passing this motion, but there is a cost to under-resourcing and side-lining the environmental aspects of our mission. Not only the obvious cost to future generations and the poor, but the cost of a lost opportunity to speak good news and to be listened to.

*Photos from Ruth’s church, St John’s Sharrow. Credit: Joe Priestley*