

Launch of Manx Target 25

Bishop Tricia's opening message

Welcome and thank you for coming together as we consider our call to safeguard creation and to share in God's work of sustaining and renewing the life of the earth.

.... I am really intrigued by the Manx Target 25 list we will be hearing about this morning. And I am indebted to the work that Louise Whitelegg is doing to bring us together today. Drawing on her wealth of experience and commitment to faith-based action Louise is working in partnership to help identify a list of 25 vulnerable habitats and species found here on the Island but which are struggling with the effects of climate change and habitat loss.

- 25 habitats or species about which we will hear more.
- 25 species or habitats from which we will be invited to choose to adopt or partner with; to help support and protect.

How amazing that the list includes a specific type of lichen which is found in very few places on earth!

In fact this lichen is not found in only a few places on earth ... it is ONLY found here, on the Island and in our churchyards.

We are rightly proud of the biodiversity found on this Island which is something to celebrate but we cannot take it for granted.

Bishop Tricia then shared a personal story of significance for her. She was born in Malaysia; tropical seas, corals, rainforest and jungle. And she recalls journeys travelling from one side of the country to the other; from their family home to visit grandparents.

Over two days we'd make our way through dense lush forests whose canopies held creatures which seemed magical to me; slow lorries, orangutans, vividly plumaged birds.

Decades later when I returned with my husband Andrew I was so excited to show him all these riches...and booked us onto a 'wildlife tour by night'.

It profoundly shocked me. We were taken to vast areas with nothing but palm oil trees in stately but barren rows. As for creatures of the night we saw and heard ... nothing. The rich diversity which had been so astonishing had been cut and burned away ... pushed into smaller restricted national parks.

Sometimes you don't know what you've got until its gone...

And in the present:

....we meet at a time when concern for the natural environment can no longer be held at arms-length, if it ever could. It has to be tangible and profoundly local and deeply spiritual.

We are here then to consider how we as Anglican churches on this isle can live out the answer to the question:

*'What does it mean to love God and neighbour
in a world where creation itself is under strain?'*

Bishop Tricia led us through two key questions:

Why should we care? and What difference can I make?

Why should we care?

As people of faith, the answer begins with creation itself.

In Genesis, we are told that God looks upon all that he made and declared it *very good*. The goodness of creation is not instrumental; it is intrinsic. Species and habitats do not matter merely because they are useful to us, but because they are cherished by God.

The scriptures and especially the psalms repeatedly remind us that the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. When biodiversity is diminished, something of God's glory is muted.

In the poetic language of Genesis, the creator God, looked at all creation, declared that it was good and decided that someone was needed to care for all this goodness.

That someone, those 'someones' are us; it is part of our vocation as human beings and certainly as people of faith.

To ignore the fragility of local ecosystems is not neutrality — it is a failure to exercise the responsibility entrusted to us. It's like walking by on the other side when a neighbour, another aspect of the creation we've been asked to look after, cries out for our help. I'm sure that someone once told a parable about that ...

All this is why we should care.

This conviction is captured powerfully in the **Church of England's Fifth Mark of Mission**: *to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.*

This is not an optional add-on for those with a particular interest Care for creation is woven into the church's mission because the gospel itself is cosmic in scope. In Christ, God is reconciling *all things* to himself.

Vulnerable species and habitats are indicators of wider fragility. When local ecosystems collapse, it is the poorest and most marginalised – human and non-human alike—who suffer first and most. Flooding, food insecurity, loss of green space, and declining soil health are not abstract environmental issues; they affect real communities, real parishes, real lives. To care about biodiversity is therefore an expression of neighbour love.

The Manx Target 25 list (has been) brought together in partnership – and we are delighted to have some of those really significant partners with us today.

We can take tangible steps. The emphasis is on the *local*; your local area, your parish, your churchyard...God has placed each of us in a particular place, with particular relationships, responsibilities, and opportunities.

(This) forms part of the answer to the second question many people ask, sometimes with quiet anxiety:

What difference can I make?

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the state of the world and amidst everything else going on.

But Christian hope is not rooted in our capacity to fix everything; neither is it mere wishful thinking – it is rooted in the conviction that we are to live out our calling in caring and it may well begin with the patch of the earth nearest to our own feet.

Attention, Action, Partnership, Witness

The difference we make begins with **attention**. Learning the names of local species. Noticing what is present and what is disappearing. Paying attention is a spiritual discipline—it trains us in gratitude, humility, and care.

It continues with **action**, however small it may feel. Churchyards managed for wildlife. Pollinator-friendly planting. Reducing chemical use. Supporting local conservation projects. Using church land, buildings, and influence wisely. These are not symbolic gestures; collectively, they create real ecological resilience.

We also make a difference through **partnership** between churches, conservationists, schools, local authorities, and community groups. When we partner locally, we witness to a gospel that brings people together for the common good.

Finally, we make a difference through **witness**. In a culture often marked by anxiety or apathy about environmental issues, the church can offer a distinctive voice — neither despairing nor complacent, but hopeful, grounded, and active. When Christians care for creation, we embody a faith that is incarnational, practical, and outward-looking.

Manx Target 25 is an invitation to align with the work of God already underway in Jesus, empowered by the Spirit who breathed over the creation at the beginning and today.

So today I invite us to hold together theology and practice, prayer and action, hope and responsibility.

And to trust that, in God's economy, faithful local action – rooted in love – really does matter.