

***St. Michael on
Greenhill,
Lichfield -
a prayer trail
around the
churchyard***

***Praying for our world and our
responsibility for its care.***

Introduction

This prayer trail was first used in the run up to COP26 in Glasgow in October 2021, to pray for the success of that conference and for environmental and climate issues in general. In what follows the material specific to COP26 has been removed, but the walk can still be followed as a way of praying for God's beautiful but fragile world and our stewardship of it. The churchyard gives us glimpses of the beauty and glory of creation and offers many opportunities for prayer. This walk consists of ten prayer stations which use the environment and the memorials as foci for different prayer topics. For each station, there is a word of explanation, followed by readings, reflections and prayer biddings.

Station 1. The old places



We begin at the back of church overlooking the large yew tree and looking out over the south and east of the city. Yews of course can grow to a great age (although the one we have here is not particularly old), and Greenhill itself on which the church stands has been used for Christian worship for 1500 years

and perhaps for other forms of worship before that. This “old place” reminds us of the immense age of our world at four billion years, and the relatively short time that humanity has been around - just a million years or so. And yet we have it in our power to do immense harm to our fragile world. We use words from the poem of Genesis 1 and Psalm 104 for our reflection.

A time for reflection—Genesis 1. 1-10

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was

evening and there was morning, the second day. And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

Verses from Psalm 104

You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.

A TEAR Fund prayer.

Lord God, you made the world and declared it was ‘very good’. And yet, we have not treated the earth and our fellow humans with the care and respect they deserve. We are sorry and ask for your forgiveness. Give us the courage to keep raising our voices about the climate emergency, which affects people living in poverty the worst. And may your Spirit of peace be in the hearts of all people, so that conflicts end in peace, and relationships are restored. Amen.

Station 2. The wild places



The trail now takes us down the slope to the path at the back of the churchyard, where we bear left and follow the path around between the old and the new churchyards. When we see the angel and cross on our left, we head up the slope towards it. Station 2 at this point is in one of the wilder, more overgrown parts of the churchyard, and a place where wildlife (including in recent years Muntjac deer) finds refuge. It reminds us that humanity is not the

only inhabitant of this planet - yet, as the angel and cross symbolizes, God's care and love extends to even the wild places and all who live there. Again, we use verses from Genesis 1 and Psalm 104 for reflection.

A time for reflection—Genesis 1.20-25

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw

that it was good.

Verses from Psalm 104

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.
By the streams birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.
The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coneys.
You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.

A Prayer from TEAR Fund

Creator God, we acknowledge that as your handiwork, we stand alongside all that you have made. Trees and rivers, mountains and valleys, soaring birds and scuttling creatures, all are held within your care. May we grow in our love and appreciation for the fabulous variety around us; and may our awe and wonder draw us closer to the natural world, and through it to you, the God of all things. Amen.

Station 3. The tamed places



Continuing past the angel we walk up the slope to the open area with scattered trees and isolated gravestones where we pause for the third station. This is one of the more domestic parts of the churchyard, with flower meadows and typical British trees - the oak and the ash in particular. Here we

can reflect on our countryside - how it provides for so much of our needs yet is itself under threat. This leads us to pray for all farmers and fishermen who provide for our daily needs.

A time for reflection—Genesis 1.11-13

Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

Verses from Psalm 104

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.

A time for prayer for those who care for creation and provide our food and other needs using biddings from the Baptists Union

- We pray for the protection of threatened habitats across our world, in particular the rain forests.
- We pray for the rewilding and restoring of habitats so that we allow nature to restore eco systems and create sustainable agriculture across the world.
- We pray for Christian organisations engaged in encouraging our stewardship of God's creation
- We pray for our farmers and fishermen as they will have to change practices in the coming decades.

Station 4. The Petit grave



We head north and turn right along a well-made path between trees and stop in front of a display board for the Petit grave. John Louis Petit was a nineteenth century landscape artist and architectural critic who was for a time curate at St. Michaels', and his life and work are

commemorated on the display board. We use this as a focus for our prayers for all artists and poets who enable us to imagine a better more sustainable future for our world, and for all architects and planners; engineers and transportation experts who can help us to achieve it. We begin with a well know reading from Sirach that extols the potential and achievements of all, known and unknown.

A reading from Sirach 44

Let us now sing the praises of famous men, our ancestors in their generations. The Lord apportioned to them great glory, his majesty from the beginning. There were those who ruled in their kingdoms, and made a name for themselves by their valour; those who gave counsel because they were intelligent; those who spoke in prophetic oracles; those who led the people by their counsels and by their knowledge of the people's lore; they were wise in their words of instruction; those who composed musical tunes, or put verses in writing; rich men endowed with resources, living peacefully in their homes— all these were honored in their generations, and were the pride of their times.

Some of them have left behind a name, so that others declare their praise. But of others there is no memory; they have perished as though they had never existed; they have become as though they had never been born, they and their children after them. But these also were godly men, whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten.

A time to pray for all artists, scientists and engineers using biddings from the Baptist Union

- We pray for artists and poets and all who can help us to imagine a better future
- We pray for all architects and those concerned with the places we live - that they might design and build energy efficient and sustainable buildings
- We give thanks for the gift of science that has allowed us to see how our use of fossil fuels is affecting people and nature around the globe in the present and the future.
- We pray for scientists working to understand the impact of Global Warming and who are using their creativity ways to mitigate against its worst effects.

Station 5. The Durrad grave



We turn around and retrace our steps for about 20 yards to our left, in a somewhat overgrown area, we find the oddly shaped Durrad grave. William John Durrad was Lichfield's first station master from the 1840s to the 1860s and was also a churchwarden at St. Michael's. In those days the railways were at the forefront of the industrial revolution that has brought so many benefits in terms of living standards and lifespan, and also so many environmental problems. Railway firms were amongst the major commercial organisations of the day, often in aggressive competition with each other. We use the grave as a focus for our prayers for all those involved in industry, commerce and business, particularly in terms of the environmental effects of their activities. We begin with a reading from Proverbs describing the ideal commercial operation in the figure of the capable (or good) wife.

A reading from Proverbs 31

A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. She seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant she brings her food from far away. She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and tasks for her servant-girls. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands

to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid for her household when it snows, for all her household are clothed in crimson. She makes linen garments and sells them and she supplies the merchant with sashes. Strength and dignity are her clothing and she laughs at the time to come.

A time to pray for all involved in commerce and business using biddings from the Baptist Union

- We pray for all involved in commerce and industry that their primary motive should be service and not profit
- We pray that they should seek energy efficient and sustainable ways to produce and transport their products
- We pray for green jobs to be created across our world, bringing hope to millions of lives.
- We pray for end to investment in all forms of fossil fuels.

Station 6. The Law grave.



We follow along the path to a junction of paths and then to the open area beyond the junction. From here we can see to our right the Law monument and to our left old St. Michael's school. William Thomas Law was the Chancellor of the Diocese of Lichfield in the nineteenth century. As well as being a leading ecclesiastical figure he was also prominent in the field of education, being instrumental in the founding of Lichfield Theological College and the School of Medicine and Surgery at Queen's College, Birmingham. Old St Michael's school was opened in the mid nineteenth century, largely through the efforts of successive Rectors of St. Michael's, and continued in use, latterly as an annex to the new school on Cherry Orchard, until a few years ago. We focus here on praying for the world of education, both those who teach and those who learn, particularly in terms of understanding the environment in which we live. We begin with a reading from the book of Wisdom.

A reading from Wisdom 6

Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for she will be found sitting at the gate. To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding, and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care, because she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously

appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought.

The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her, and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality, and immortality brings one near to God; so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.

A time to pray for all in education and for places of learning

- We pray for teachers and lecturers - that they may communicate the wonder and fragility of creation to their students
- We pray for local places of education - St Michael's, King Edward's, Saxon Hill and Scotch Orchard schools and local colleges and universities.
- We pray for those who learn - that learning about the effects of climate change might lead to a resolve to change things throughout their lives.

Station 7. The Howard grave.



We turn around and walk to the east end of church, where a little searching is required to find the diminutive Howard grave. Percival Howard was the Rector of St Michael's from 1914 to 1946. As well as loyally serving the parish during and between two wars, he was also a chaplain to the forces in France between 1914 and 1915. We use the rather humble and small plot in which his ashes are interred as a focus for prayer for all church leaders and pastors. We begin with the call of Isaiah, often used at ordination services for Christian ministers, but equally well serves as a call for all Christians to take part in the mission of the church.

A reading from Isaiah 6 - God's call to his people

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the

altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

A time to pray for the church and its leaders, using biddings from the Baptist Union

- We pray for the Holy Spirit to awaken the hearts of all Christians to our complicity in harming God’s creation and then to see ourselves as those who should lead by example.
- We pray for our church communities to invest in green solutions within our buildings and land, and a willingness to share best practice.
- We pray for Christian voices to speak up against the injustice of climate change as it effects the poorer nations disproportionately, and for richer nations to financially support green solutions across the world.

Station 8. The Finney grave.



We walk around the front of church and head over the open area in the direction of the north gate where we find the Finney tomb, one of the oldest in the churchyard. Edward Finney was one of the bailiffs of the City of Lichfield in the 1620s and 1630s and was active in civic life. After his death he established a “bread dole” at St. Mary’s endowed with 1s. a month which still existed, as the Edward Finney Charity in 1715 - effectively a seventeenth century foodbank. We use his grave as a focus of prayer for all politicians and civic leaders in relation to environmental issues and climate change. A heavy load for Edward Finney to bear! As we look out over our city, we use Daniel’s prayer for his city - Jerusalem, devastated by invading armies.

A reading from Daniel 12 - a prayer for the city of Jerusalem

Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his supplication, and for your own sake, Lord. Let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary. Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation and the city that bears your name. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay! For your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people bear your name!”

A time to pray for civic and national leaders as they grapple with environmental and climate issues

- We pray that the UK government as they develop and implement targets for climate action and achieving net zero carbon usage.
- We pray for justice and fairness for the poor and disadvantaged to be at the heart of any actions that are taken.
- We pray for local leaders, here in Lichfield, for adoption of energy saving and carbon reduction policies, however difficult that may be.

Station 9. St. Michael the Archangel



We turn around and walk back to the church door. Over the porch we see St Michael in one of his iconic poses - standing over the defeated devil, representing God's victory over the powers of evil. We begin with the biblical description of this victory.

A reading from Revelation 12

And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming,

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.

In the letter to the Ephesians we read

For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Some would identify these spiritual forces as those human created systems such as the international finance and trade systems, that, whilst they have brought so much good, also seem to have a spiritual life of their own and bind us in unsustainable lifestyles we are unable to escape, in a way that can only be described as evil. The statute of Michael reminds us that evil has been defeated, and we can be released from all that binds.

A time to pray for release from the things that bind us and our world

- We pray that we may be freed from the lifestyles and material needs that bind us
- We pray for the redemption and sanctification of the worldwide networks of finance and commerce, that they may serve humanity and the world, rather than control them

Station 10. Easter Garden and Cross



The last station is at the Easter Garden - the cross and the empty tomb, marking the central events of the Christian story. Here we are reminded of the atoning love of God through Jesus, that brought redemption both for ourselves and all creation. We read Paul's words from

Romans 8 and then worship in the words of the Te Deum —an ancient hymn of praise.

A reading from Romans 8

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God

The Te Deum Laudamus—an ancient hymn of praise

We praise you, O God, we acclaim you as the Lord;
all creation worships you, the Father everlasting.

To you all angels, all the powers of heaven, the cherubim and
seraphim, sing in endless praise:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are
full of your glory.

The glorious company of apostles praise you. The noble fellowship of
prophets praise you.

The white-robed army of martyrs praise you. Throughout the world
the holy Church acclaims you:

Father, of majesty unbounded, your true and only Son, worthy of all
praise, the Holy Spirit, advocate and guide.

You, Christ, are the King of glory, the eternal Son of the Father.

When you took our flesh to set us free you humbly chose the Virgin's
womb.

You overcame the sting of death and opened the kingdom of heaven
to all believers.

You are seated at God's right hand in glory. We believe that you will
come and be our judge.

Come then, Lord, and help your people, bought with the price of your
own blood,

and bring us with your saints to glory everlasting.

A final prayer from the Archbishop of York

Creator God, giver of life, you sustain the earth and direct the nations. In this time of climate crisis, grant us clarity to hear the groaning of creation and the cries of the poor. Challenge us to change our lifestyles. Guide our leaders to take courageous action. Enable your church to be a beacon of hope. And foster within us a renewed vision of your purposes for your world, through Jesus Christ our Lord, by and for whom all things were made. Amen.

