

LENT: FASTING...AND CARBON FASTING

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What do you do during Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter?

For Christians, Lent is the time to remember the 40 days that Jesus spent in the Wilderness, facing challenge and temptation.

It is a time to reflect on God's purpose for our life.

Prayer, penance, repentance of sins, atonement, giving to others (almsgiving) and self-denial are ways that help Christians remember this time in Jesus' life and wait and prepare for the celebration of His resurrection at Easter.

Traditionally, Christians have practised fasting and abstinence from festivities during Lent, just as Jesus did in the Wilderness. These practices feature in many religions. For example, Muslims will fast during Ramadan. They will also practice self-restraint in body and mind. This fasting, from dawn until sunset, is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is a time to purify the soul, refocus attention on God, and practice self-sacrifice – just as numerous Christians do in Lent.

A lot of people use this period of fasting as a way to trial or begin a positive change to how they live some aspect of their lives.

In recent years, many Christians have adapted this noble tradition to become more mindful of – and reduce - their impacts on Creation.

Anglicans have been at the forefront of this move. A Carbon Fast challenge for Lent originated in England. **Six dioceses in southwest England** then developed resources for individual people and church and school communities to reflect and tread more lightly on the Earth.

- In 2014, the Carbon Fast became a part of their Lenten spiritual devotion, and helped them discover the financial benefits of stewarding resources. They undertook a specific challenge to reduce energy consumption by 40 percent for the 40 days of Lent. (This is a significant challenge in England in early Spring!)
- In 2015, the focus was on the link between our use of water, which needs to be pumped, cleaned and stored; energy use and the things we 'consume'.
- In 2016, the **Lent Carbon Fast** reminds us that that God is our Creator as well as our Redeemer, and emphasises reconnecting with the Earth. 'It is in deepening our awareness of the web of life and our interconnectedness with all things, that we can deepen our love of God and appreciate and protect the planet for the future.'

The **Anglican Communion Environmental Network**, **Tearfund**, **TEAR Australia** and **Interfaith Power and Light** are among the organisations that have joined in helping people and communities undertake a Carbon Fast for Lent. These resources usually contain:

- a weekly theme, with resources to read or watch and reflect upon
- actions or challenges to take as an individual
- some suggestions of community actions you can take
- something you can consider doing to change the system
- daily email encouragement and support

For Lent this year, the **Anglican Communion Environmental Network** again challenges us to take on a **Carbon Fast** and to reduce actions that damage God's Creation. I like the way it includes reflections and actions at both individual people and church levels.

If you would like to take on a specific challenge for the whole of Lent, some good ideas for 2016 are:

- change your mode of travel. ACTSmart is running **Change your Mode for March**. Challenge yourself, friends and colleagues. Register by 5pm on 29 February to be part of the online competition and be in the running for prizes.
- joining the **Lent Plastic Challenge**. Give up some or all of your use of 'single-use' plastics. This is a way of reducing a raft of **adverse impacts** on Creation (especially wildlife and visual amenity) from our current lifestyle.
- try the traditional Lenten challenge of eating **meat-free meals**. This is what led to Carnivale (literally 'meat farewell') – the lead-up to the period of avoiding meat during Lent.

Undertaking a Carbon Fast is a great way look at how we go about our daily lives and try new ways of doing things. I especially like the way it is only for a limited time...it's a way of trying out more difficult changes before committing to them permanently. Lent provides a good focal point for undertaking a Carbon Fast– or you can do it any time you wish.

Checking your **environmental footprint** before you start the fast and again when you have finished is a great idea. It can be very enlightening and can help you see what impact your individual efforts have.

There is no better time than now to try new ways of living that reduce our adverse impact on Creation. Join me and Anglicans around the world as we fast from carbon during Lent. Here is a **prayer** from the other side of the world to get us going:

Lent Carbon Fast Prayer

*Most loving Creator God
who has given us a world full of delights and wonders;
As we prepare with the grace of self-sacrifice
and self-discipline for the great festival of Easter
remind us how to treasure these gifts
and to use them with care;
So that all may equally share in the earth's bounty
and all creation may be restored to your image
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen.

By Gillian King