SUSTAIN AND RENEW THE LIFE OF THE EARTH

THE COMMUNION FOREST

RENEWING THE LIFE OF THE EARTH ACROSS THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

The Communion Forest is a *global* initiative comprising *local* activities of forest protection, tree growing and eco-system restoration undertaken by provinces, dioceses and individual churches across the Anglican Communion to safeguard creation.



To plant is to hope

We are living at a time of multiple global crises, emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic and with climate change, conflict and an emerging food crisis. In our collective pain, we need symbols and actions of hope.

The Communion Forest is a symbol and act of hope – something we can do together as God's Church for God's World as we journey on from the Lambeth Conference.

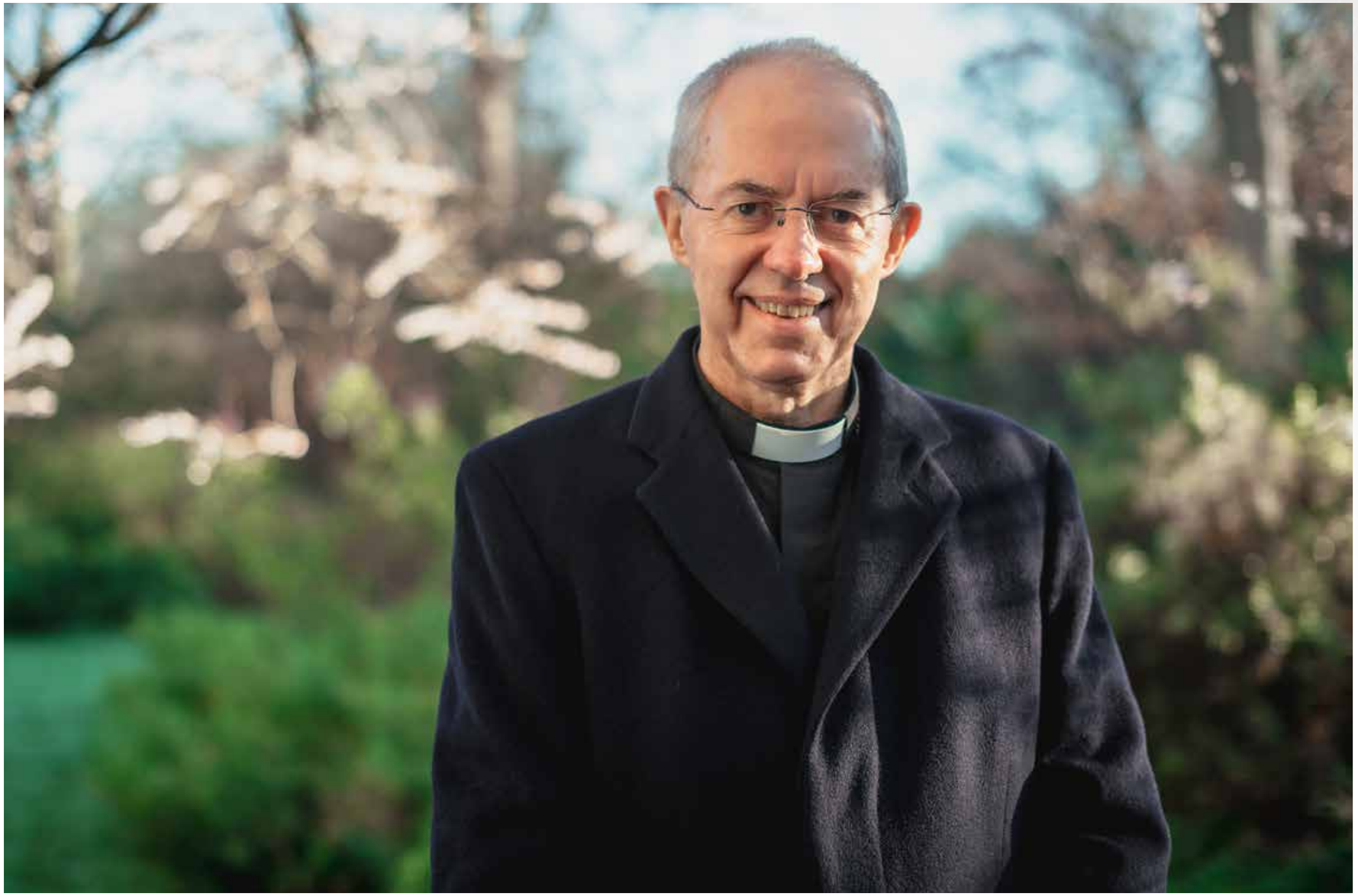
The Communion Forest will take many different forms across the Anglican Communion, reflecting the rich diversity of our global body. I encourage you to join in this exciting initiative in your way, whether by protecting a precious environment, restoring a degraded one or planting something new. All these activities are spiritual acts too, for:

- To plant is to hope
- To protect is to love
- To restore is to heal – to share in God's reconciling work in all creation.

Jesus himself is often found outdoors in the gospel narratives. Key moments of his ministry took place on mountain sides, on the Sea of Galilee, in the wilderness and by the Jordan River. On the night before he died, Jesus, found peace as he prayed to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane amongst the olive trees.

Please join together in this act of hope, love and healing.

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury



Welcome to the Communion Forest

The Communion Forest is an initiative of the Anglican Communion to join together in protecting and restoring forests and other habitats throughout the world. It reflects the Anglican Fifth Mark of Mission: ***Strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.***

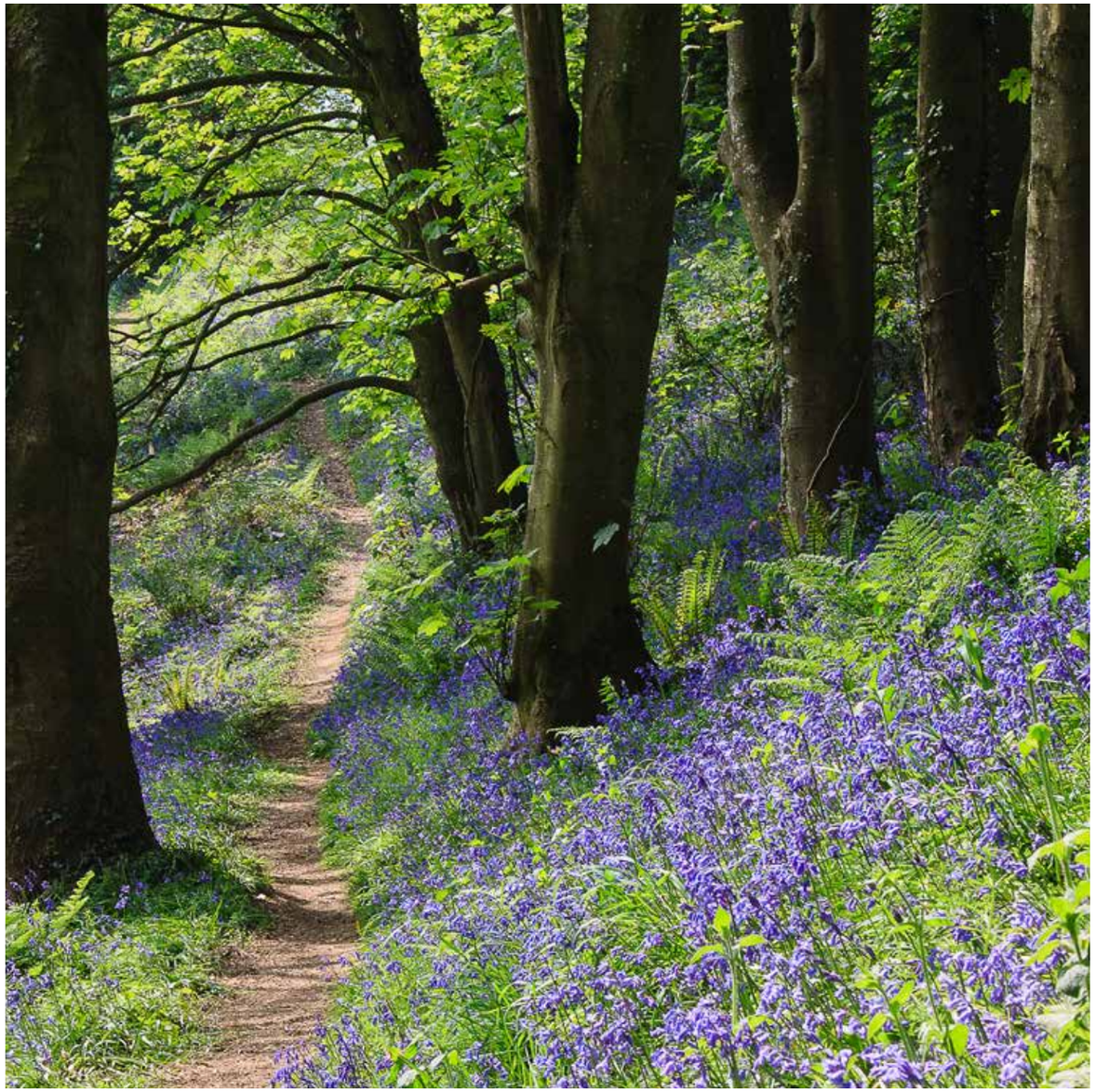
The Communion Forest is a practical, spiritual and symbolic response to the environmental crisis, and an act of Christian hope for the well-being of humanity and all God's creation.

In the face of climate change, biodiversity loss, profound human suffering and social inequality, we need to act urgently and with greater ambition.

Forests help to stabilise the climate, protect from flooding, sequester carbon, sustain biodiversity and generate food and livelihoods for communities across the world.

We invite you to join the Communion Forest initiative. Together we can learn from one another, be inspired by initiatives already underway and help to equip churches for environmental protection, restoration and renewal.

The vision is for the initiative to be woven into the spiritual and liturgical life of the Church, helping people to connect their faith with caring for God's creation.



Create a legacy of the fifteenth Lambeth Conference

Launched at Lambeth Palace, during the Lambeth Conference in 2022, the Communion Forest is envisioned as one of the legacies of the fifteenth Lambeth Conference – something lasting that makes tangible our shared commitment to the Anglican Fifth Mark of Mission.

All bishops and their spouses are invited to take part in this Communion-wide initiative, sharing it with their dioceses and communities around the globe.

The Communion Forest seeks to be a shared and lasting expression of the 2022 conference theme *"God's Church for God's World – walking, listening and witnessing together."*



Growing the Communion Forest

Join a global act of hope

The Communion Forest will involve a wide range of creation care activities. Wherever you are in the world, you are invited to start a new creation care initiative – or develop an existing one.

Together, these projects will form a virtual, global "forest". Over time, these will be made visible through the sharing of initiatives on the Communion Forest website.

The forestation activities will be determined locally (by provinces, dioceses and individual parishes) so that they are geographically, culturally and environmentally appropriate.

The "forest" will therefore look very different in different parts of the Communion. Local expressions might be about trees but could equally be about grasslands, wetlands or coastal habitats.

"The world is at a decision point; the planet is heating up, the vital biodiversity that protects and connects life on the planet is crashing, and the risk for economic instability for millions of people is increasing. These challenges are interconnected, and forests can provide a vital nature-based solution to help address this triple challenge. Forests are not the only solution, but we can't succeed without them."

Trillion Trees guide to investing in forest restoration



Growing the Communion Forest

Actions bishops can take

Bishops have a key role to play in ensuring creation care is an integral part of the mission, life and witness of the Church. You might choose to:

- Promote the Communion Forest initiative in your diocese.
- Include tree growing to celebrate occasions and services, for example birthdays, marriages, births, baptisms and confirmations. Give confirmation candidates a seedling or sapling to plant and care for as a symbol of their spiritual growth.
- Use your voice and influence to protect and restore forests and other ecosystems.
- Set aside a plot of land to grow appropriate indigenous seedlings so that the diocese and community have a source of inexpensive tree saplings.
- Engage with young people. They are often severely affected by climate anxiety and already taking action. Encourage them, amplify their voices, involve them in Communion Forest activities and help them to connect their environmental activism with their faith.
- Use the Season of Creation as a special period for promoting this initiative and creation care.

Actions churches can take

By acting together as a worldwide Anglican Communion, we can have a big impact in the global response to care for our planet.

Every action taken can help to protect habitats and biodiversity; provide food or green space for people to enjoy; defend against soil or coastal erosion; sequester carbon; prevent environmental destruction; reduce pollution in urban areas; contribute to peace building.

A project doesn't have to be new – but could continue or add to an activity that has environmental benefit.

You might choose to take up a project that involves:

- **Protection**: Advocate and take action to stop deforestation or prevent the destruction of other habitats.
- **Restoration**: Restore a piece of waste land or other degraded environment.
- **Creation**: Start a forest initiative on church land or support a project in the wider community.
- **Growing**: Protection and restoration should be considered ahead of establishing something new. Where something new is set up, the emphasis should be on *growing,* not just *planting*. It is about growing the right kind of tree in the right place.
- **Multiplying:** Help others get involved. Be a 'multiplier', by setting up a tree or plant nursery to enable wider participation in afforestation.







"When it comes to climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, the vast majority of us have a learned reaction of helplessness, we see thedirection the world is headed and we throw up our hands. Yes it is terrible, but it is so complex and so big and so overwhelming. We can't do anything to stop it.

This learned response it not only untrue, it is fundamentally irresponsible. Know that you are incredibly lucky to be alive at a time when you can make a transformative difference to the future of all life on earth.

You are not powerless. Your every action is suffused with meaning and you are part of the greatest chapter of human achievement in history"

Christiana Figueres "The Future we Choose"

It is time to choose between life and death.

(Deuteronomy 30:19)

The Communion Forest – A Biblical Reflection

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month."

"And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."
Revelation 22:1-2

In the face of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its catastrophic consequences... in the midst of the triple environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution... and with violence and conflict raging around the world, these words from the book of Revelation are a tender reminder of God's saving purposes. God's heart is "for the healing of the nations".

In the Revelation vision, trees of life stand on either side of a crystal-clear river, flowing with the water of life. The trees provide food and their leaves bring healing. It is a scene of abundance, of restoration and of life.

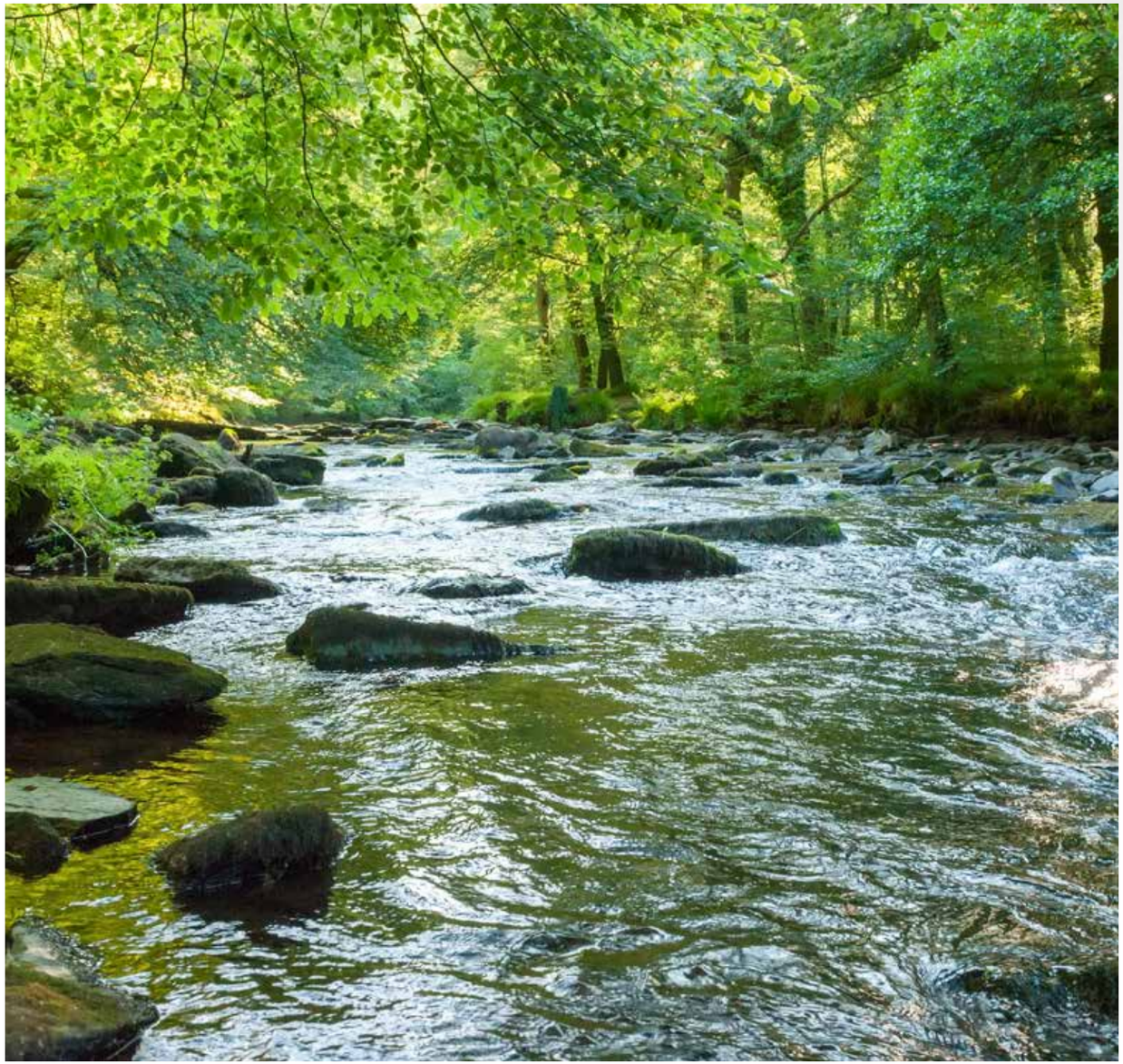
The biblical narrative begins in a garden of trees, which humankind is to "tend and keep" (Genesis 2:15), and ends with a tree-lined river. The vision in Revelation is not a return to the original status of Creation. Instead, a new element is introduced into the sacred garden – a restored and holy city. What a powerful message about the possibility of transformation of human civilization and urban systems.

Throughout the Bible, trees are frequently part of the story as people encounter God. Abraham entertained angels at the oaks of Mamre. Moses stood shoeless next to the burning bush. Elijah sat in despair by a broom tree and was given refreshment. Nathaniel was called from under a fig tree to a new way of living, and Zacchaeus climbed the sycamore tree because he was desperate to see Jesus pass by.

Jesus himself was no stranger to trees. From the manger where he was laid as a new-born baby, to his work as a carpenter and to the cross on which he died, wood shaped his life. Jesus found solace in nature, communing there with the Father and he spent his last evening in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.

People speak of entering a connectedness with the creator amidst nature. Walking in a forest environment is shown to be good for body, mind and soul. Many are those who, when in nature, feel that they can join in the song of creation that they can hear all around them: "let everything that has breath praise the Lord!" (Psalm 150.6)

However, the world's forests and other plant communities are imperilled, along with the great diversity of species which rely on them, and humanity itself. We are in a climate and ecological crisis. We are at a decision point for the future of humanity and our common home, the earth.





Why does the Communion Forest Matter?

Responding to the Environmental Crisis

The integrity of creation is under threat and at risk of collapse. The life systems of the earth are under severe strain from the triple environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

"Humanity is waging war on nature. This is senseless and suicidal. The consequences of our recklessness are already apparent in human suffering, towering economic losses and the accelerating erosion of life on Earth."[1]
UN General Secretary, António Guterres

The environmental crisis is an existential threat to millions of people and species of plants and animals across the globe. Slow onset disasters, such as drought and sea level rise, as well as rapid onset disasters, such as catastrophic flooding and wildfires, take lives, destroy habitats and beloved homes, devastate livelihoods, cause food shortages, force migration, disrupt communities and break up families. The impacts of the crisis are costly, both financially and in terms of the trauma they create, not least to young people.

1 The United Nations Environment Programme synthesis report Making Peace With Nature opens with these stark words from the UN Secretary General.

Living out our Anglican Fifth Mark of Mission

Anglicans have long held a holistic understanding of mission, which not only takes creation care seriously, but also sees it as one of the principal ways we share in God's ongoing story of love in the world.

This is most clearly expressed in the Fifth Anglican Mark of Mission: ***Strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.***

The Communion Forest is a practical way of:

- Safeguarding the integrity of creation, and sustaining and renewing the life of the earth.
- Helping with afforestation and preserving. biodiversity, providing habitats, protecting ecosystems and removing some carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- Recognising the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life on earth.

Work to protect and restore forests is just one of many crucial actions which need to be taken to respond to the environmental crisis. It is hoped that the Communion Forest will act as a gateway to wider environmental concern and action, informing and inspiring Anglicans everywhere to make creation care a core part of their discipleship.

The Communion Forest also has symbolic value. It represents:

- Our love and concern for God's creation, our common home
- Our Christian discipleship
- Our commitment to the Anglican Marks of Mission
- Our broader engagement with tackling climate change, preserving biodiversity and reducing pollution

As such, the Communion Forest can provide a source of inspiration, embodying our shared values.

The Communion Forest is also an act of Christian hope. In the face of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and environmental crisis, creating the Communion Forest is a choice to create a better future, *together*.

"In addressing climate change, few actions are as critical, as urgent, or as simple as planting trees. This ancient carbon-absorbing technology needs no high technology, is completely safe and is very cheap. It literally reverses the process that has led to climate change, in that as trees (and all other biomass) grow, they absorb CO_2 from the air, release oxygen and return carbon to its rightful location: in the soil. In addition, trees provide coveted green areas in cities, reduce ambient temperature, may produce food, and stabilise aquifers in rural and suburban areas."

The Future We Choose, Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac, p133.

Contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Representing millions of Christians and present in 165 countries, the Anglican Communion plays an important part in supporting the global Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations.

Every action we take adds up. By starting the Communion Forest initiative, we can make a contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals: **SDG 1** no poverty, **SDG 2** zero hunger, **SDG 3** good health, **SDG 6** water, **SDG 11** sustainable communities, **SDG 13** climate action, **SDG 15** life on land, **SDG 17** partnerships.

UN Sustainable Development Goals















Support and resources

Join the Communion Forest Community

For the first year of the life of the Communion Forest, a resource person will be employed on a part time basis to offer support to dioceses, liaise with partners for technical support, help to source seed funding for dioceses, monitor progress, and facilitate communication, including sharing stories and experiences.

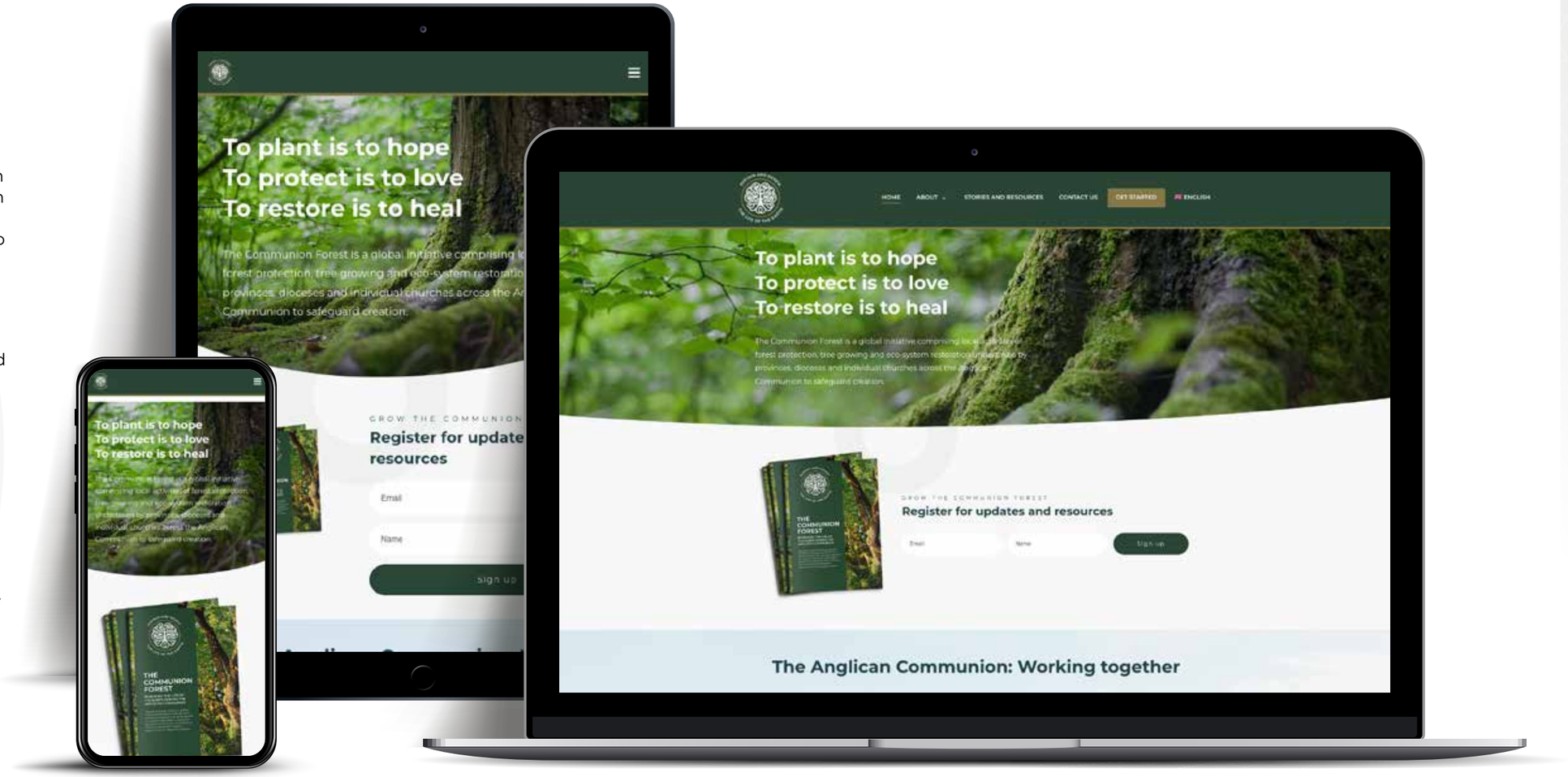
The Communion Forest is not a project that will be centrally funded, managed or imposed from outside.

Keep in touch with this team at:
communion.forest@aco.org

More detailed information and resources are available on the Communion Forest website:
communionforest.org

Join us online, so we can learn from one another and share stories about the life of the Communion Forest over the next decade.

Materials are available in the four official Communion languages: Spanish, Portuguese, French and English.



Wider Reading

There are many excellent resources available from specialist organisations to help you make decisions and plan well:

The Trillion Trees project assessment tool provides a very helpful starting point for thinking about forest protection, restoration and tree planting. The tool provides clear, practical guidance on what makes for good forest restoration and allows you to assess your intended project against those measures. Also look at Trillion Trees for insights on how local initiatives can build into a global movement.

Visit Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI) and Faiths for Forests for information on the importance of protecting tropical rainforests – and the role of faith leaders in doing so. IRI has many useful resources, including faith toolkits and resource guides.

IRI has also published an extremely helpful primer for religious leaders and faith communities on forest restoration for use during the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has produced a superb Community Organizing Toolkit on Ecosystem Restoration "to equip you, as change-makers, with the tools, knowledge, and resources necessary to restore your ecosystems back to productive, and healthy spaces". It covers farmlands, forests, freshwaters, grasslands, shrublands and savannahs, mountains, oceans and coasts and urban areas.

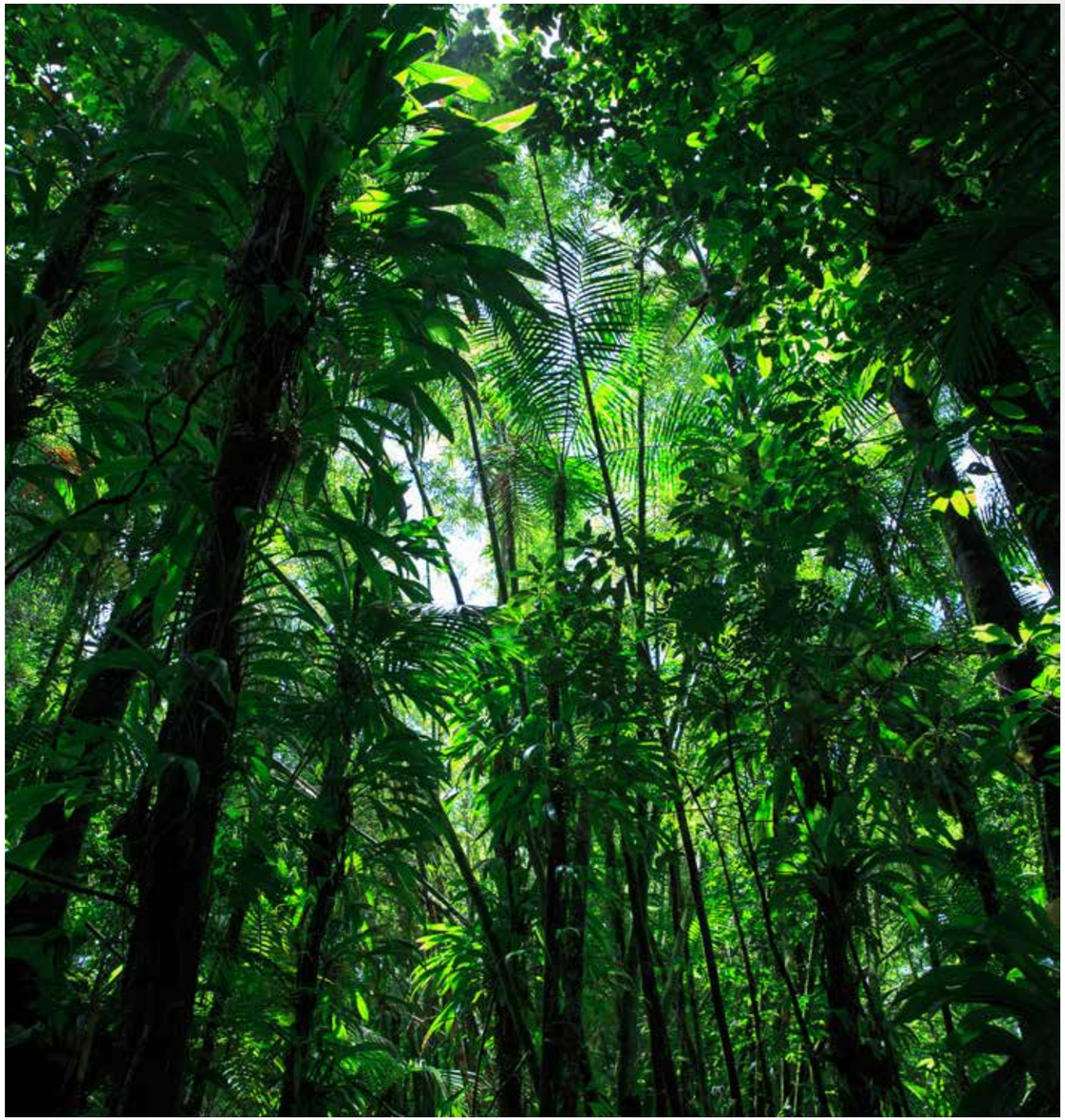
Principles for Successful Tree Planting, is a short guide from the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) about initiating a forestation project. This provides a solid foundation for any initiative. It explains the basic mantra that should underpin any activity: the right tree for the right place and the right purpose. CIFOR has further and more detailed information on its website. Affiliated with CIFOR is the Global Landscapes Forum, the world's largest knowledge-led platform on sustainable landscapes.

For further ideas and inspiration, take a look at the varied case studies from across the Anglican Communion on the Communion Forest website.

The Communion Forest initiative has been developed by a working group of bishops from across the Communion, the Anglican Communion Environmental Network and the Anglican Alliance.

ANGLICAN COMMUNION ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

ANGLICAN ALLIANCE
Development · Relief · Advocacy



Keep in touch with this team at:
communion.forest@aco.org

More detailed information and resources are available on the Communion Forest website: communionforest.org

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