

Net zero conference offers hope for future

PARISHES from the dioceses of Guildford, Portsmouth, Chichester and Winchester, and beyond, gathered for a joint conference to raise hope and strengthen collaboration in caring for God's creation.

Over 150 delegates were inspired by real examples of churches striving towards net zero carbon, practical guidance on securing grant funding, and a powerful address from a group of young Christians who spoke about why creation care is central to their faith.

The Rt Rev Paul Davies, Bishop of Dorking, led a panel discussion with Bishop Jonathan, as well as the Bishop of Lewes and the Archdeacon of Winchester. They outlined their climate vision for the next decade and emphasised that caring for creation is deeply woven into all Five Marks of Mission.

They reflected on how conversations with global Anglican partners – many ministering in communities facing landslides, wildfires, flooding and repeated evacuations – bring the urgency of climate action into sharp focus. They also stressed the need for the Church to speak with a stronger, more united voice on environmental protection as many Western governments are retreating from the issue.

The conference was hosted at St John's Stoke, in the Diocese of Guildford. Delegates toured the church to see how it is currently undertaking ambitious work as part of its pathway to net zero. A highlight of the day was hearing



Young people from Haslemere share their message about creation care at the joint net zero carbon conference in St John's Stoke, Guildford

from a group of teenagers from Haslemere parish, who have championed creation care locally. They offered a hopeful message: churches should not be shamed by what they haven't yet done, but be inspired by Jesus' teachings to take the next step.

They also heard from Julian Atkins, head of the Church of England's net zero programme, who provided an update on the national commitment to achieving net zero carbon by 2030. Afternoon breakout sessions explored how churches can communicate effectively about climate change, advocate for creation alongside organisations such as A Rocha and Christian Aid, and strengthen environmental partnerships with local church schools.

The bishops agreed that a key

follow-up action would be to make a joint case to the Church Commissioners, asking for increased funding for net zero work ahead of the next triennium.

Bishop Jonathan said: "I found it hugely inspiring. Not because of great statements, or huge leaps forward – though there have been many wonderful leaps forward and things shared here – but because of the commitment of so many who gathered quietly, in their parishes and communities, to take the next right step, the next step forward.

"There is, for me, an ever stronger sense that, as we put Jesus at the centre of things, so we put ourselves at the centre of his concerns. He sustains all things, and to be a church that is Jesus-centred and seeking the kingdom is to care for the priorities that he has."