

BBC Transcript of 'Sunday' - 25th October 2009

Starting at 6.13 minutes into recording:

Presenter: In just over a week's time, leaders from nine of the world's major faiths representing billions of worshippers will meet at Windsor Castle. The aim is to come up with a concrete plan of action to help save the environment. Just a few years ago the idea of American Evangelicals playing a lead role would have been pretty far fetched, but a delegation from Baltimore's New Psalmist Baptist Church are on their way. Matthew Wells went along to find out why they're going to Windsor and what they hope to achieve:

Bustling background noises of microphone, laughing and movement.

Matthew Wells: Children dressed as animals, birds and even trees bring Genesis to life on this first creation Sunday, at New Psalmist Baptist in the West Baltimore suburbs. It's a new initiative to drive home the message that the environment is God-given and needs saving. More than 7000 active evangelicals come to this sanctuary every Sunday attending three back to back services. Bishop Walter Thomas is their founder and lead pastor.

(Bishop Walter Thomas in background)

The excited mainly African-American worshippers are proud that their church has drawn up its own seven-year environmental plan for the Windsor conference. Their delegation will perform a gospel song, written specially for the event. Today they're hearing it for the first time:

Music - James Morant singing: "He gave his life for all creation to complete the father's will"

JM: "My name is James Morant and I work here at the church on the global policy committee. I've dealt with environmental policy issues over the last, I guess about 15 years, specifically dealing with multilateral relations."

MW: Now retired the former senior government official wrote the words for the song, "That's what the Cross Would Say" which is adapted from an Anglo Saxon poem. He's also the lead singer and looking forward to their command performance at Windsor.

JM: The poem was called 'The Dream of the Rood'. It basically takes the cross and personifies it, and the cross is indicative of a tree, and the tree, obviously trees are a vital resource in the climate change debate because they're the lungs that sort of clean the air.

Al Bailey: My name is reverend Al Bailey, I am the minister of mission and outreach here at the New Psalmist Baptist Church. In 2005 we actually took our first trip to Nairobi, Kenya. We saw the need for water in Kenya - clean water- and began to take action right from there

MW: So do you think people's eyes were opened by the extent to which the environment really influences lives overseas?

AB: We brought footage back - video footage - and we began to show our congregation just how other people in the world live. They immediately said "OK, we need to do something to help this issue".

MW: The reverend Al is one of the team responsible for the Church's Seven Year Plan. He says small local steps will empower a new global movement.

AB: We're really looking to focus on practical lifestyle issues and changes we can make personally as congregants of the church. Not only are we starting paper recycling here, but we're also looking into recycling plastic and bottles and even electronic equipment; we're seeing how we can make our church green. How can we cut down on our energy costs?

MW: Do you think other churches are going to follow the kind of lead your church is showing here?

AB: The blessing of New Psalmist is that we are a network of churches, our bishop is not only our pastor but he is the presiding prelate, which simply means that he oversees about 40 to 50 churches. We start something here, it gets duplicated not only around our city but around our whole nation. And in addition to that, we're working with a church in Nairobi Kenya, and they oversee approximately 2000 churches.

MW: The bishop keeps his message simple and direct; going green's about social justice and putting right centuries of neglect, while just a few years ago conservative fundamentalists saw environmentalism as irrelevant at best. The evangelical world's woken up he says.

AB: Sometimes people see the urgency of a problem as the problem becomes clearer in view. We are seeing climate change; we are seeing people crying out for help.

MW: What would you say to a sceptical politician who might say "well look, religious leaders can't really affect the kind of change we can"?

JM: Think what you want, we know we can. The great movements of history and life have always been founded somewhere in a faith community. In Windsor we're there to see faith communities from all over the world, representing billions of people making a statement that will be read and picked up and incorporated in the lives of billions of people. Those of us who've had just a small hand in the crafting just marvel at what God will do as a result of this.

Presenter: James Morant ending that report by Matthew Wells on the American Evangelicals heading for Windsor Castle to do battle over the environment.