**2019 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.**

**Indonesia is the largest country in South East Asia, made up of more than 17,000 islands, 1,340 different ethnic groups and over 740 local languages, united by one national language. About 10% of Indonesians are Christian. Despite its size and diversity, Indonesians have lived by the principle of gotong royong which is to live in 'solidarity and by collaboration', regarding all Indonesians as brothers and sisters.**

**But this principle of solidarity and cooperation sits ill at ease with the modern Indonesian approach that has led to both economic growth and the growth of corruption, with devastating effects on its people and especially on the environment. As a result, a country rich in resources has many people living in poverty and is causing great damage to the environment.**

**This year the Christians of Indonesia found that the words of Deuteronomy, 'Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue...'(see Deut. 16:18-20) spoke powerfully to their situation. The question which they would want us to answer on the theme which they have chosen is; how do Christians in the Ireland of today pursue justice and only justice especially in the area of poverty and of the environment?**

**Recently, I was intrigued by a quotation I read from a man I never heard of. He was Wendell Berry and he said: 'whether we and our politicians know it or not, Nature is party to all our deals and decisions, and she has more votes, a longer memory, and a sterner sense of justice than we do'. Having read this, Mr Google came to my aid and lifted my ignorance by telling me that Wendell Berry is an American novelist, poet, environmental activist, cultural critic, and farmer. Bear with me, therefore, for a few moments as I tease out the wisdom contained in this nugget in terms of justice.**

**'Nature is party to all our deals and decisions and she has more votes, a longer memory and a sterner sense of justice than we do.' When it comes to nature, creation and the environment, Pope Francis leaves aside his mitre and speaks from the heart to all religions. Recently he said; "Religions have a very important role in this task of promoting care and respect for the environment. Faith in God leads us to recognise Him in His creation, which is the fruit of His love for us, and which requires us to care for and protect nature. For this reason, it is necessary for religions to promote genuine education, at all levels that helps to disseminate a responsible and careful attitude towards the demands of care for our world. The believer is a defender of creation and life and cannot remain silent or passive." Care of creation, our common home as the Pope sees it, is a justice issue and should be the concern of all of us gathered here this evening. If, as Wendell Berry says, nature has a longer memory and a sterner sense of justice than we do, what do we need to do if we are to avoid the wrath of nature?**

**From the point of view of climate change, while everyone around the world feels the effects of climate change, people living in the world's poorest countries are the most vulnerable. Every year, for example, farmers in the Niger must cope with the hunger gap - a period of time when the year's food stores have been depleted but the next harvest is not ready. Climate change has lengthened the dry season, and, with it, the time when families must go without food. Clearly, the Book of Deuteronomy's admonition 'justice and only justice shall you pursue' would admonish us from a strictly justice point of view to take our responsibility for this change seriously. But I think Deuteronomy would go further. It would ask us believers to look at the spirituality which should lie behind all our efforts and colour our commitments.**

**Indonesia has a long history of living in peace with nature. Their taboos are, in my opinion, a reflection of their respect for the presence of a greater power at work in the environment; their version of what we today might call a spirituality of nature. On the islands of Banda, for example, there are ecologically-minded taboos against cutting trees in areas that provided sources for drinking water. On Sumatra, there are jungle taboos against sharing food from the same pot and many local people regard the tiger as an enforcer of proper behaviour; believing that a person who is killed by a tiger is being punished for some crime or transgression or broken taboo. These rules were passed on orally from one generation to the next in what we might see as a religious tradition.**

**As Christians, I believe that our focus should be on the words nature and creation rather than on the word environment. Nature and creation arise from a spirituality, a vision based on faith. 'Justice, only justice shall you pursue' then leads us into the new world of looking at 'our common home' with the eyes of faith and the challenge of Gospel values.**

**As believers, as Christians, I think the neglected area of our care for creation, for nature and for the environment is not in the political but in the spiritual. For all our efforts to recycle, to grow our own and avoid the almost mandatory use of plastics today, we fail in many ways, as Christians, in promoting a spirituality of care for creation, our common home. Yes, we preach the opening chapter of Genesis, we believe in the transient nature of our world and our lives but do we see God's presence radiating out of every pore of the world of nature; pores that in many ways have been blocked or damaged by man-made inventions since the eighteenth century at the least.**

**And if we were to be inspired by a spirituality of nature, where would that lead us? In Indonesia, the damage done to God's creation inspired Indonesian Christians to ask us to focus this year on the Book of Deuteronomy and on the theme of 'justice and justice only shall you pursue'. How can we look on our environment and see it through the lens of God's creation? What do we need to do to heighten awareness of not only the damage done to the environment but the destruction of nature itself? Wendell Berry's reminder that nature has a sterner sense of justice than we have and nature challenges us Christians, in the name of God, to look at the way in which we treat the world of nature today. It challenges us to contribute to making respect for it from a Christian point of view more central in the thinking of our culture. Sensitivity to nature in all its glory, awareness of the presence of God in the world which he has created must be the bedrock on which we base all our campaigns to make the world we live in a better place in which future generation can live. And we do this with an awareness that what we do in Ireland today will, eventually, have knock-on effect in the Indonesia of tomorrow and help the cause of justice in their country.**