

# Climate Brewing | Andrew Fellows

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## SPEAKERS

Susan Oxley  
Andrew Fellows

### **Susan Oxley** 00:28

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. This is Susan Oxley. I'm your host today from Seattle, Washington in the United States. This is the series climate brewing. And today I'm interviewing my good friend Andrew fellows from clay cross, Derbyshire in the British Isles Mission Center of Community of Christ. Andrew and I both serve on the North American Climate Justice Team. Andrew is a church member who has participated in many peaceful protests in the British Isles, sometimes alone, sometimes with other church members. He had a chance to travel to Glasgow with Michael Clark, to witness and raise their voices at COP 26. That COP 26 is one of the international gatherings of world leaders who meet each year to create international agreements about fossil fuel use, carbon emissions, ecological justice for developing nations, and funding green energy. Andrew has also been to London protests and rallies and traveled to other areas of the British Isles as an advocate for climate justice. So welcome, Andrew. I'm glad you could be with us.

### **Andrew Fellows** 01:43

Thank you, Susan. Nice to be here.

### **Susan Oxley** 01:45

Thank you. Well, I specifically invited you to this podcast because you are a climate activist, and advocate. And our topic today is climate justice in Great Britain. So what was it that led you, Andrew, into doing your first protest? Or rally or March? How did you get there?

### **Andrew Fellows** 02:17

Well, I suppose for me, it started in summer of 2019. I remember watching on TV, and there was a big pink boat in the central London, blocking traffic, and people dancing around it, who were part of Extinction Rebellion. I thought, 'that's all a bit odd and a bit interesting,' but they were making a difference. The government seemed to be taking notice of them and had meetings and suddenly the UK governments were declaring climate emergencies and things were happening. And so that was a big start.

For me, I think where it went from there was I happened to be at a Christian festival that year, helping Community of Christ. We were promoting the Community of Christ Sings, doing a few hymns from that,

and seeing what people's reaction was--selling a few hymn books as well. And while I was there, also, I noticed a few people that had a very similar logo to Extinction Rebellion: that's the circle, which represents the earth, an hourglass within it, which says that we're running out of time. But what was different about their logo is it had a crucifix at the top too. So I inquired who they were. And they are Christian Climate Action, an organization that was set up before Extinction Rebellion, but has joined Extinction Rebellion since--sort of become the Christian wing, if you like of Extinction Rebellion.

And so I was interested. I was a bit unsure about Extinction Rebellion. They seem very extreme to me and I didn't know really-- well, that was really what I wanted to do. But talking to CCA, Christian Climate Action, really helped me understand, really, what our role should be. And pointed out that things just aren't working. We can do as many do as many letters to our MP, as we like, we can fill in applications, we can do all sorts of things. But actually, none of those are working. We actually get out on the streets and express ourselves, then that really makes change--in the same way that a lot of things have changed in history. We think about particularly in the UK, the suffragette movement, where women were fighting for their vote, and they came out and they spoke on the streets and they caused a bit of mayhem and things changed actually. That's how it started.

**Susan Oxley 05:02**

Yes, that was one of the famous protests in history that made a difference.

**Andrew Fellows 05:08**

Yeah, that's right. A bit more extreme, even the next time, I would say.

**Susan Oxley 05:14**

Yes, that's true.

So I'm curious, Andrew. I've heard you speak about different roles that people can play at a rally or protest. And I'd like you to share with me what you mean by a different role and different responsibilities that people can choose for themselves in participating in one of these protests.

**Andrew Fellows 05:42**

Yeah, so part of the process of protesting with Extinction Rebellion, and Just Stop Oil, and Christian Climate Action, and people like that, is that they take you through a training process. So you go along, and you have a day's training with them. And they talk to you about that nonviolence, and the importance of that. But they also tell you about their organization. It's surprisingly organized. And that's what I didn't realize, you know. I thought I just got on the street and do some protesting and maybe someone's got arrested how that happened.

But no, it's all organized. So there are people in the back office constantly on phones to people who are protesting. There are teams of ex-police, who are police liaison. There are legal teams on there, with all their vests and everything showing that they are legal teams. And then the people that are protesting are broken down into those that are arrestable--those that have said, 'I would like, you know, I think I'm ready to be arrested. And I could be arrested if the moment happened that way.' And then groups of people who've decided they're not investable.

Now, there's always a risk that you're gonna get arrested anyway. But you can actually take steps to make sure that's not going to be yourself, if that's the way you want to do it. And for me, and for Michael, we definitely didn't want to be arrested. We wanted to support in other ways. And we were able to help out on the ground--even be very close to what was happening during an arresting situation--but actually not be so involved that we, too, were arrested.

For example, we took on a role of arrestee support. So during an arrest, what would happen was, a member of the police would come up to you or other people and say, 'if you don't move off the road, I'm going to have to arrest you. And I'm going to arrest you under Section Whatever (a number)' And then you then had a choice. You could get off the road and not be arrested or you can stay on the road and be arrested. And so what would happen is police would then come back and say, 'Well, you've been warned, and you stayed, and so we are going to arrest you.' And so they then start to arrest.

What's important for Extinction Rebellion and other organizations is that they hold a road situation for as long as possible. And so the more people that volunteer to be arrested, the longer the process takes, and therefore the road is held much longer and more inconvenience then for the transporter sector.

So I was able to help out in arrestee support. And that just really meant that I'd have a person that I'd be looking after who was being arrested. I'd make sure that he or she was comfortable, had water. I'd probably take their personal belongings off them--anything that might identify them, including their mobile phone. That way, the process would take much longer once they got to the police station, because they'd have difficulty identifying the individual. And Extinction Rebellion really wanted everything to take longer and longer than would normally happen during an arrest in order to be--the longer it takes, the more it costs. And therefore, the more inconvenient it is for the police and the public. And so I've just obeyed that advice.

I think on one occasion, I remember that I was looking after a lady older than me, who was being arrested. And for some reason the arresting officer decided to handcuff her--which is—you know, a peaceful demonstration, there's no violence in there at all—and they're handcuffing her. So I was able to have a word with the Chief Superintendent. He was there as well—and say, "Excuse me. I'm looking after this lady and your officers handcuffed her. I want to know why that is." And they took the officer to one side, and said, "You shouldn't have handcuffed her!" you know. And I was able to record all that, and then pass that on to back office, which was then used in her process when she went to court. And actually, it was one of the things that made sure that she wasn't actually convicted at that time, because she had been unused unduly subjected to force when she didn't need to. So it's useful to take that information.

**Susan Oxley** 10:36

Wow, that's really impressive. I'm glad you were there for her. That's great.

**Andrew Fellows**

We're good friends.

**Susan Oxley**

I'm glad! That's good.

So about how many protests do you think you have actually participated in?

**Andrew Fellows 10:52**

I don't know. Uhm, not that many, probably about eight to 10, I'd have thought, that sort of thing?

**Susan Oxley 11:03**

And did you provide arrest support for most of those?

**Andrew Fellows 11:08**

Yes, some of them were, I think. When it's more of a march, then just being there holding a banner or something like that, is what I'd be more doing. And if it was an actual event where there were likely to be arrestings going on, then I would be--yes, I'd actively participate in arrest support where I can, yeah. It's a way that you can be really close to what's happening without feeling stressed that you might be the next person to be arrested. And sometimes I got too close. And police were like going "You're getting too close. Would you mind stepping back?" and I was "okay, I'll step back." You know, just to be sure, everything's fine.

But normally, it was done very much. They, the police knew that what XR [Extinction Rebellion] wanted to do was have more people arrested, because that affects the stats for the end of the year. So when they look back at the year and say, "Well, you know, we had so many arrests and several thousands of those were protesters on climate," then that obviously makes an impact then on government decisions for the future. And that's the whole point.

**Susan Oxley 12:25**

I understand. Wow, that's impressive.

How did the other church members around you in your congregation and Mission Center react to your participation in these protests? Did you have some pushback?

**Andrew Fellows 12:39**

Yeah, I did, I did. To start with people are very uncertain. This whole idea about breaking the law is something foreign to Christians, it really is. We don't want to do any harm. We don't want to break any rules. We want to remain within the law, not above it. And so yes, it for some people is really quite difficult to understand why someone would put themselves through something like that. Tarnish your reputation.

One: I remember at one meeting with a group of Seventy. And one member said, "Well, obviously Andrew, if you get arrested, you'll need to hand in your priesthood." And that was a defining moment really, when that happened. Because of that--because then three or four quite prominent people, Andrew Bolton being one of them, said, "If Andrew loses priesthood, then I'm going to hand mine in, too." And so that made a big difference really, then, to people's perception about what putting yourself in that situation might be.

I think the other thing was that people were very unsure about science in the early days and didn't really understand how severe climate change was likely to be in the future. Now, I'd say, there isn't, I think... Since the UK declared a clear climate emergency--that is, British Isles Mission Center--there's been no pushback, just support, which has been marvelous, really. Marvelous.

**Susan Oxley 14:23**

That's great. How has protesting changed since you began to now? Have there been changes in the way that the protests are organized? Changes in the way the police handle you? What's going on?

**Andrew Fellows 14:40**

Yeah. So there's been lots of change.

Changes really come from fossil fuel companies who have developed fossil fuel think tanks, then advise government on what they should be doing. And those advisements have become more than that. They've been written into law as well. And fossil fuel companies have actually taken individuals that-- they've set up injunctions for individual protesters not to be outside their premises or not to be outside their refineries, or not to be on their forecourts. And then, in fact, sued common protesters individually for hundreds of thousands of pounds, knowing they would—no, no way would they be able to afford it. That would bankrupt them as individuals. And so that's been really difficult.

Also, those think tanks have advised our government, which is currently conservative, to do things like to persuade judges that a person can't use the excuse of climate change for their actions. And that's really the whole defense of someone who would be in court, who would, you know, have been arrested for obstruction or for being on the road too long, or for criminal damage as well. They would be there. And their reason would be because the government is not listening to us. And they need to listen to us. Because, you know, we're telling you what the future looks like. And so certain judges have said that, you can't use that. And that will be that will be completely stripped out. It will be inadmissible in court, so you cannot use it as defense. And if you do start to use it or start to talk about it, then you will be held in contempt of court and get another caution.

Now, what's been really interesting on the back of that is that climate activists have then decided to escalate their protests to include criminal damage. That means maybe to break the window of a bank, or of a BP headquarters--to use a hammer and chisel and break the glass. [BP meaning British Petrol.] That's right. Yeah, BP. Yeah, or Esso as you might... Yeah, so those sort places. That way, you would go to a higher court, and there'd be a jury present. And this has been really interesting.

And so there's a famous case, the Esso Four, four people who occupied Esso's headquarters and caused criminal damage, and they went to court. There was a jury so the stakes were much higher. And the judge said that they can't use this excuse, if you like, of climate change, and... But the jury acquitted them, mainly because of what the judges said. So despite that, a jury has the right to acquit if it feels it's necessary. And so there's been quite a few of those where juries have gone against the judges in the court of law, and acquitted climate protesters. So it's interesting. So the stake's getting higher, but things are changing.

**Susan Oxley 18:35**

What about the police cooperating as they have in the past? Are they still pretty much cooperative and polite? courteous?

**Andrew Fellows 18:46**

Yes, I think there are, I think you can. When you're on protests, you normally get to understand who the police are that are in front of you. So for the big protests, they'll be shipping police in from all over of United Kingdom. They'll be coming through in minibus' loads and you can see them going down the motorway as you're going in on a coach or train. You can see these police vans all heading down to London, to police the t protests that's coming.

And generally speaking, like I was on a protest and talking to the officer that was facing me, it was very close to me. I was holding a line. And we were virtually face to face. And it turns out that he lives about half mile from where I live. He was it was from Darby, like I was. And so it's quite, quite amusing, really, that we could talk about local stuff, really, just there face to face. They were just there doing a job. And normally, you know, not heavy handed.

I think where that changes is sometimes the local police force. So the Metropolitan Police Force are known to be much harder, and they have various sections within their police force. And some of them can be a bit heavy handed and can take over. Often when that happens, it's normally because the Chief Constable of the Metropolitan Police has said, "We must clamp down on these violent protesters," and so they've gone in a bit more heavy handed of late. What's been interesting that's happened since then is that normally the XR [Extinction Rebellion] legal team will then swing into action. And, and they've been able to overturn all the arrests that have happened because of that event. Because they're saying that that's unlawful, and so there we are. So hundreds of people who've been arrested then have to be released without charge. [Okay.] All causing the government more costs as well.

**Susan Oxley 20:45**

Of course. So what kind of advice would you give to people who might be interested in attending their first rally, protest, march? What would you say to them?

**Andrew Fellows 20:58**

I think it'd be, I think, first of all, protesting has to be fun. It has to be something you really want to do. And you're going to get some flack. It is great to stand in a crowd, to wave your flag, and to sing along with the songs that people have rewritten to popular tunes. It's a really very nice environment to be in. Sometimes I would say, a very special time.

I remember one occasion where we were holding a road. And it was getting to the point where we were going to lose the road. And a band of the XR protesters called the Red Rebels had come in, who had solemn painted faces, and dressed all in red, and they're very dramatic. And they came in and completely diffused the whole situation. And they caught, they made a cordon around us who were holding the road. And when that happened, the police had to laugh. So it was quite, it was quite emotional at that time, and quite a spiritual moment.

And so I would say it has to be fun. So yeah, do that. Most important, I would say, go with someone who's been protesting before. He's done it a few times, understands the ropes. Definitely do the training. If the charity or if the organization is campaigning or protesting, they probably do some sort of training, it's worth doing the training. It really is. And then yeah, go with someone who's done it before. Search it and see, see whether it's something you want to do it again in the future before you go on your own.

**Susan Oxley 22:45**

So what if there's a group of friends of mine who say, "Susan, I think this is terrible. We've got to go protest this, come on, let's go." [Yeah.] It's like five or six of you make signs and you go down and you protest? What, what happens? What would you say to those people? To me and my friends?

**Andrew Fellows 23:05**

I would, I would say, it's great that people have that sort of reactive attitude towards things and want to do something. But actually think about what you're going to do. I normally spend some time praying about what I'm going to do in the next protest, to try and understand what I might be going through and, and also to ask for some help. I think that would be a good thing to do. I would offer if people have been very reactive like that, is to slow people down a bit. And get them to realize what the implications of having a protest might look like. And just be sure in your own mind that's something you want to do.

I think in my own life, I've always been a non-arrestable, but that won't always be the case in the future. There will come a time, I think, when I'll put myself on the line to be arrested. And I'm completely aware of what the consequences of that might be. And I think you need to go into a protest understanding the possible consequences of your actions.

**Susan Oxley 24:12**

I understand. So. So the best thing to do is to align yourself with a responsible group that has good credentials, if you're going to be protesting.

**Andrew Fellows 24:23**

I would think also, if you're going to put yourself in a situation where you are going to be vulnerable to arrest, it's worthwhile having a chat with your family. If you've got a partner with your partner, with the church, and understanding whether you've got their support or not. I know that from my perspective, I have Helen my wife fully supports the stuff that I do. I know my family do as well. I'm retired so I don't have a financial income so the company isn't employing me so they're not going to get upset if I was to be arrested. And my church is fully behind my actions. And so that gives a person a lot of confidence and a lot of peace.

**Susan Oxley 25:10**

That's wonderful. I'm glad.

Okay, great. Well, thank you. Andrew, do you have another protest coming up soon?

**Andrew Fellows 25:19**

Um, haven't got one. There is one actually very soon in the UK this weekend. But unfortunately, I'm at a wedding. {Okay!} t's, it's the bishop's son that's getting married, so I need to be there. [Of course you do. That's excellent!] Life often gets in the way of a protest.

**Susan Oxley 25:41**

There's always another opportunity.

Thank you so much, Andrew. I really appreciate your expertise and the wisdom that you've shared with us. This is amazing. It may help others take that first step to join their first march, their first rally, their first protest. I appreciate it very much.

**Andrew Fellows 26:00**

I look forward to hearing it. Thank you. [Thank you.] Bye!