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| **Caring for God’s Creation in Lockdown by Cathy Rhodes** |

In Inspire last month John Green wrote about the A Rocha Eco Church award scheme, on behalf of our Climate Crisis Group. The scheme encourages us to review how we care for God’s world in worship and teaching, looking after our buildings and land, engaging with the local community and global campaigns, and the personal lifestyles of the congregation. We are delighted to say the initial assessment is for a Bronze award, which is currently being assessed by A Rocha.

A Rocha has a vision that the gospel is ‘good news’ for God’s earth, as well as for God’s people. It is part of our Christian calling to acknowledge the effects of the climate emergency on the earth and its people, especially those with limited resources. In the article for Christian Aid week in April’s magazine, we learned of drought starving Rose’s crops in Kenya. Rivers are dry so Rose walks for six hours to collect water for her grandchildren. Rose and her family are battling a climate crisis they didn’t create. These countries now face the huge challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic, and Christian Aid is working with services in affected areas.

Our community has showed enormous generosity in donating to Christian Aid in the midst of immense difficulties and loss which are associated with the pandemic. Acting to reduce our carbon footprint and impact on the earth is a natural extension of that generosity. Our church buildings may be closed for a season, but we can still care for and consider God’s Creation as we prepare for a loosening of lockdown. Here are some ways to strengthen our Care of Creation.

We are starting to think how our church can contribute to the Church of England’s new challenge of reaching net zero carbon by 2030, as mandated in a Motion at General Synod earlier this year. As the new Diocesan Environment Officer, Bishop Pete has given me the task of working towards this in the Diocese of Sheffield. At St John’s we are planning to ask Green Journey (the renewable energy experts recommended by the Diocese) to conduct an energy audit. They can then advise us on the switch to cleaner, greener energy, save us money on our energy bills, with a positive impact on the environment.

We will also enter our figures for electricity and gas use in the new Church of England Energy Footprint Tool (EFT). This is now part of the Annual Returns, alongside information for Mission and Finance. The EFT will tell us the amount of carbon produced annually by heating and lighting our church buildings. There are two useful graphs which show us our efficiency scores (similar to the rating on your appliances!). One is for energy efficiency based on building size and one for attendance. Brian is looking into this, so we will have an assessment to add to the information from Green Journey.

It is important to plan our responses to the climate and ecological crisis, to be ready as lockdown changes. We are lucky to have the Climate Crisis Group already in place, and the application for the A Rocha award will give guidance on the areas where we need to develop further.

When walking for exercise or to the supermarket, or in our gardens, we can all pause to enjoy the spring foliage and flowers around us. Nature isn’t locked down! Deer and badgers have been seen in the city centre, and birdsong has been easier to hear with our quieter streets. In our live-streamed and recorded services, we still include prayers for God’s Creation and all that live in it. We can worship God with them, using Creation as a gateway to prayer or praise. The connection between the natural world and worship is ingrained in our faith as most of Jesus’ teaching was outside! As we hear birdsong we can remember ‘Let everything that has breath praise the Lord’ (Psalm 150:6) and ‘Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth’. (Psalm 96:1) There are free resources linking our experiences of nature with worship at: <https://www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet>

As we gain a new appreciation of the natural world around us, and have seen how a mass change in behaviour can be achieved, I hope we can respond to the call of the Archbishop of Canterbury:

***‘Reducing the causes of climate change is essential to the life of faith. It is a way to love our neighbour and to steward the gift of creation.’***

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