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|  **“How Green is your Church”? - Part 2** |

“Quite a lot’ would seem to be the answer from A Rocha to our application for Eco-Church recognition. Whilst we have been awarded Bronze status, as Cathy Rhodes wrote last month, we have been graded Silver in three of the five areas of the checklist - Worship & Teaching, Buildings and Lifestyles, which is good news. The other two areas are Land and Community & Global Engagement so the Climate Group has started work on improving our scores and achieving Silver overall.

“Land” at St. John’s includes the Parish Centre as well as the areas around the church building. The top priority is encouraging wildlife, which in a suburban setting like ours, mainly involves bird, bat and hedgehog boxes as well as bug hotels to support insect life. Our young people’s groups have already made a start and we hope they will enjoy this next challenge. The other key issue is flowers and particularly wildflower areas to attract insects and pollinators such as bees.

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The ‘grass’ at the front of church is mainly ‘weeds’ also known as wildflowers and plants, if you look closely. Leaving some islands un-mown until late June (2021) would encourage them to flower and, with a bit of judicious planting, look as interesting as the roadside verges that the University Landscape Department created along our main roads. Eco-church encourages participation in wildlife surveys through the year, so we will have a way of checking progress.

In Community Engagement there are more challenging issues, particularly with catering. Whilst we have used Fair-Trade tea and coffee for many years, food prepared in the Parish Centre kitchen has to meet Environmental Health standards before any others, if we are to retain our 4 star accreditation, so using eco - cleaning products could be a problem. Sourcing Fair-Trade, organic, locally grown food within a tight budget is also challenging financially, when buying the ingredients.

Eco-Church encourages involvement with environmental groups and local sustainability programmes and events. Hosting a “Green Fair”, at St. John’s, which brings together groups and agencies concerned with environmental issues is another possibility as well as promoting global involvement through Christian Aid and events such as Earth Day (22nd April) and “Faith for Earth” both promoted by the United Nations Environmental Agency. One such initiative that we have already supported is the Tearfund “Toilet Twinning” scheme. The new disabled toilet in the Parish Centre is already twinned with a toilet in Africa. Cathy has written in more detail about extending this to our other toilets elsewhere in the magazine. ( PAGE REF. )

The Thursday afternoon Bible Study Group discussed Ecology this month and explored in more detail some of the issues from the Advent Study series last December. The book we are now studying is by Sam Wells, the Vicar of St. Martin’s in the Field in London called - *“How then shall we live? “* This covers a wide range of contemporary issues from a Christian viewpoint and has certainly challenged us on a Thursday afternoon. The model he uses when discussing ecology and climate issues is an equilateral triangle that connects us as Christians with God and the rest of creation. They are tightly connected in that we cannot contemplate the nature of God without reference to his creation nor study creation without witnessing the hand of God or as Sam Wells puts it -“Earth is the theatre of God’s glory”, through which God reveals himself to us; or as Dylan Thomas described it in his (secular) poem - “The force that through the green fuse, drives the flower”.

The Climate Group has started to draw together an action plan to enable us to achieve the Silver standard (or higher!) so if you are interested in helping, we would love to hear from you. Please contact John Green or speak to Debbie Timms or Cathy Rhodes.

 ***John Green***

 ***St. John’s Climate Crisis Group***