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| **How “green” is your Church?** **by John Green** |

“Not very” - you might think - but we are hoping to find out over the coming months. You might recall the parish survey in the pre-Covid days of February asking everyone to give their view on the relevance of the Climate Crisis to us at St. John ’s. The February Inspire carried a report on the results which showed that there is almost universal support for St. John’s making a response to the crisis.

One such early response was that on 15th March we were able to field a team of 6 to help with tree planting on the moors near Lady Canning’s Plantation. This is part of a flood prevention programme being managed by the Eastern Moors Partnership which aims to increase the retention of rainfall on the moors and keep it out of the River Don - literally an “up-stream” solution. The Partnership is led by the RSPB and National Trust and manages the Eastern and Burbage moors on behalf of the Peak Park and Sheffield City Council. Other work in the Dark Peak area of moorland involves planting sphagnum moss to replenish the peat bogs that act like sponges in a miill-stone grit area with high run-off potential.

Thank you to the Thickett and Wozencroft families and Brian Parfett for volunteering at short notice. We came into this programme late in the planting season, but we hope to field a bigger team when the next season starts in late November. The plight of Fishlake, in November 2019, when the Don flooded and the subsequent community effort, centred on St. Cuthbert’s church in the village, were what prompted our action.

Meanwhile we are currently ‘marooned’ in a different way, with the Covid-19 pandemic, so the Climate Group thought this was a good time to investigate the A Rocha Eco-church programme and assess how we measure up to their ‘green’ standards. Matthew and Cathy Rhodes have encouraged us, based on their experience in Sutton Coldfield, where they were the first church in the Deanery to achieve the bronze standard. Cathy has recently been appointed as the Diocesan Environmental Officer and the Bishop’s Adviser on the Environment.

A Rocha is a Christian charity which supports the “protection and restoration of the natural world” and “mobilises Christians and churches in the UK to care for the environment”. It is a partnership between Christian Aid, the Church of England, the Methodist Church, Tearfund and the United Reform Church and is a “response to a biblical mandate to care for the earth”.

Easter and the arrival of Spring is the ideal time to consider ideas of renewal and re-birth and at a time of isolation, to appreciate the healing power of the natural world. The A Rocha Eco- church website is full of resources to help churches and individuals in their own response to the biblical imperative. [www.Ecochurch.arocha.org.uk](http://www.Ecochurch.arocha.org.uk). We used their study group resource for the Bible Study group last Autumn. This was based on the book “Planetwise” by Dave Bookless published by A Rocha. The starting point for much of this work is their Eco-church award scheme - based on Bronze, Silver and Gold levels of achievement. Parishes are encouraged to register and submit a completed checklist to be considered for an award and more importantly to have an indication of where their efforts should be directed in the future. The checklist covers five main topic areas - Worship & Teaching, Buildings, Land, Community and Global engagement and Lifestyle. Parishes are asked to complete the checklist on-line and submit the response for checking and assessment of the level of award.

We have decided to include the Parish Centre in the assessment and the Land section will include the garden and the church surroundings. Our young people have already started with wildlife projects in these areas. The lifestyle section is mainly concerned with how the church helps people make green choices. The checklist is available on the Eco-Church website, if you want to have a preview. The Climate Crisis Group, which is leading the response on behalf of the Social Justice Committee and the PCC, has started this process and by the time you read this we hope to be ready to submit our application. This should also show where we need to take further action and help guide future choices, such as in the building of our extension. Some issues will be constrained by our listed building status and this is recognised by A Rocha.

Responding to the Climate Crisis can seem overwhelming but the Eco-Church approach is a good way of identifying and organising our efforts. As I wrote back in February, we have experienced surprising outcomes from the sum of individual actions in the last 4 years - Brexit and the 2019 election. Hopefully we shall know in May whether our individual actions of social distancing and hand washing have defeated Covid-19. We shall then be ready to tackle the Climate Crisis!