

Report of key learnings from Eco Church workshop held at the Church of Christ the Cornerstone, Milton Keynes 10th June 2023

In attendance: Karen Atkins, Steve Barnes, Mary Borrett, Margaret Broadhurst, Elaine Brown, Simon Brown, Mubina Chakera, Robert Collard, Jane Entwistle, Irene Farr, Ken Harris, Neil Harris, Ken Hawes, Don Head, Stuart Kean, Barry Lotz, Paul Lund, Ernesto Lozada-Uzuriaga, Cheryl Montgomery, George Mwaura, Richard Page, Jean Peck, Steve Peck, Anne Slee, Angela Vincent

Lessons from Simon Brown's presentation - A Rocha Speaker Coordinator

- 6200 churches have registered as Eco Churches, 2000 have achieved a Bronze Award and 30 Gold.
- Try "*Messy Church goes Wild*" to engage young people:
<https://www.messychurch.org.uk/goeswild>
- Christchurch Toxteth Park, Liverpool achieved a Gold Eco Church award, including in 2005 digging up the tarmac around the church and planting flowers and fruit which local people were invited to harvest and enjoy. In 2008, pews were removed from both side aisles and the rear of the building, providing space for exhibitions and flexible worship and in 2017, a marquee was erected inside the church creating a more intimate space for worship which was also far less wasteful of light and heat: <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/our-work-does-not-stop-here-christ-church-toxteth-park-achieve-eco-church-gold/>

Lessons from St James, New Bradwell – Mary Borrett in interview with Simon Brown

- Having a supportive vicar makes for smooth and speedy progress with Eco Church
- Eco church activities progress more easily if there's a core team of people actively engaged in the church, even if it's just 2 or 3 people
- Start with activities members are interested in, such as recycling
- Quite a lot of detailed information is required to complete the Eco Church baseline survey form, requiring patience and persistence, which can be eased if you have a core team of people working together
- The comments box on the Eco Church baseline survey form is very helpful as sometimes it was difficult to choose an answer from the choices given
- If the church is part of a Local Ecumenical Partnership with other local churches, form a group of like-minded people, e.g. St James is part of a 6-church "Green Huddle" that provides mutual support, encouragement and some coordinated activities.

Comments from the floor

- Queensway Methodist Church in Bletchley succeeded in obtaining a grant from Bletchley Town Council to pay for installing raised vegetable beds
- Grants are available from most denominations to support Eco Church activities

Lessons from the Group Discussions

The following points came out of the group discussions on the A Rocha 5 Areas and are the key issues that group members thought were important lessons:

Group 1: Worship and Teaching

- Keep using opportunities to preach and teach about the dangers of climate change and what actions church members could take to care for creation
- The church must be intentional and prophetic in its teaching

- The Climate debate must be embedded in the culture of the church
- The Five Marks of Mission must be re-emphasised especially the fifth mark: “to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth”.
- Opportunities must be found to teach and sensitise the congregation about the care of creation and not just once a year....
- Learn new hymns about caring for creation such as those on the Green Christian website: <https://greenchristian.org.uk/green-hymns-for-churches-and-schools/>

Group 2: Buildings

- Old buildings are difficult and expensive to change – poor insulation
- Difficulties in moving forward from Bronze to Silver award when we can't actually change the structure of the building
- Make better use of buildings by the community to raise more funds for their upkeep and move towards them becoming more eco friendly
- Do we have too many church buildings? This is a more radical approach to think about closing old inefficient buildings with small and declining congregations and moving to fewer newer buildings. There's a need to make better use of buildings or sharing/using community buildings - maybe to start thinking about churches more in terms of being about the people who participate in the organisation and less about a lot of increasingly old, dilapidated buildings. This raises all sorts of issues around the way people feel about churches they may have worshipped in for generations and are notable landmarks in communities.
- “Building rich, people poor” was a comment made by some members of the clergy in the group who commented how many buildings the church has in some places but where there are very few members of congregations. It makes maintaining or improving the estate very challenging.
- Limited resources in terms of finance and people
- Where does the money come from?
- Change light fittings, especially changing to LED bulbs
- Alternative sources of heating are a MUST and it is important to get good advice and to hear about successful instances where a switch to alternative source heating has been made
- Advice from architects is not always useful and on some occasions needs re-ordering.

Group 3: Land

- Grow herbs and make them available to the community
- Churches and individual members should sign-up with A Rocha and registering as an Eco Church: <https://arocha.org.uk/what-we-do/eco-church/>
- Produce a more organised management plan for use of the land and let everyone know about it
- Revive interest in Eco Church, develop plans and publicise them with the congregation
- Take over outside space
- Put up bird boxes
- Birdbath in cloister garden
- Stop using membranes and use cardboard instead
- Compost bin for garden waste

Group 4: Community & Global Engagement

- Looking for opportunities - Being in community means you are surrounded by others, many of whom will have similar interests and aims to yourselves. Churches already do this, but

often the environmental links, such as local Wildlife Trusts, are overlooked. Churchyards are seriously important wildlife hotspots. See [Caring for God's Acre](#)

- Skill identification - Congregations are filled with gifted members. Do you know what those gifts are and how you can make use of them? Do not try to do everything yourself. Are you a Green Group or a Green Church?
- Communication and linking-up - Churches working together and supporting each other will often achieve far more. The skills identified above and resources can be shared.

Group 5: Lifestyle

- Undertake Eco Church activities at the speed you can manage, don't go to fast
- Don't force people to change their attitudes and behaviour, but gently persuade
- Lead by encouraging people to join in and doing activities together
- Organise occasional services on caring for God's creation
- Have regular messaging, in newsletters, magazines, weekly pew leaflets/Notice Sheets prayer rotas and social media – useful to have “Tips of the week”
- Provide opportunities for informal discussions about environmental issues – coffee after Sunday services is particularly useful
- The Plenty! Course is a small group discussion resource developed as part of Green Christian's Joy in Enough project. <https://joyinenough.org/resources/plenty/>
- Important to share useful resources within and between churches
- The WWF Carbon Footprint Calculator is a simple and easy tool for measuring personal carbon footprint: <https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/>
- Share favourite vegan and vegetarian recipes –
- Iona has a good book of vegan recipes entitled 'Iona Abbey Cookbook' - <https://www.ionabooks.com/product/iona-abbey-cookbook/>
- Publicise and support Climate Cafe MK, which is a forum to share ideas and information addressing the climate crisis: <https://climatecafemk.co.uk/>
- Produce church environmental policies, particularly for dealing sensitively with challenging issues, such as how to deal with non-ethically sourced donations
- Eco Church champions or core groups should produce annual plans outlining activities for caring for creation
- Useful websites:
 - Green Christian resources: <https://www.hopeinaction.uk/resources>
 - Church of England Environment Programme (very good videos): <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/church-england-environment-programme>
 - A Rocha: <https://arocha.org/en/>

Next steps

Participants at the workshop agreed that they would like to keep in contact and possibly meet to discuss progress, challenges, and topics of mutual interest. Holding meetings on zoom will make most sense as it will enable people to hear what is being said, but also occasional in-person social events could also be organised.