

## **Eco-Congregation Ireland and St Gall's Church, Carnalea, Co Down**

A really encouraging meeting of our Eco-Congregation group took place at the end of October. We are new to Eco-Congregation. The Vestry signed up to making this a part of our church life back in June 2019. The summer saw us complete our Eco-Congregation Audit and send that off. So, what's next?

Our church magazine in October expressed where we were going with our Harvest Celebration. Two Sundays. Two services. One side of the magazine had a traditional 'spuds and carrots' image for Harvest Sunday. The other side had a picture and words from Greta Thunberg inviting people to our Eco-Congregation Sunday service. To consider Climate Change and its impact on how church life should be.

If God's creation deserves our respect, then 'Bringing in the sheaves' isn't enough anymore. What does the Paris Agreement and Climate crisis say to us in 2019?

So, what have we been doing?

The Bike Cafe was a big hit in May of this year. Well attended and appreciated. We're repeating that in 2020 with a date in May to be confirmed. And a repeat event - with added barbecue in June.

What is the Bike Cafe? What did it look like? Bring your bike to church for coffee and a chat. Four experts on hand to fix any problems for you and show how to do basic servicing and minor repairs. Volunteers teaching basic accident First Aid. Someone teaching agility on a bike in the bottom car park. One twelve year old learning to ride a bike. Folks trying out other people's bikes - particularly a Brompton folding bike. A hot local issue is on street parking at train stations leading to nightmares for residents - but this person uses her Brompton to go to the train eliminating the car journey - is this a solution for others in the community? Do you want a try?

Some really good discussions. We'll be re-doing this event in 2020 but adding in electric bikes - a try and see if you might buy. Also, you get a chance to have an honest chat with folks who own them. Are they worth it? Spoiler alert - yes, they are!

A proposed list - a 'wish list' - has been put to the Select Vestry and to the wider congregation. This has on it a few key things that come from the Eco-Congregation umbrella. To encourage people outside to enjoy the open air - we have a 'wish' for six picnic tables to go out on to the patio area outside our cafe space. Come the summer they'll encourage people outside - and provide useful additional seating making full use of the space available. We shall be holding a couple of outside services come the warmer weather as well.

Also - we need bike parking. If people are to be encouraged to move away from car use, then bike parking should be available - a purpose-built shelter would be practical to use and also drive a wider conversation around car use by our Sunday congregation and our mid-week users. We have a design in mind. It's on the wish list.

Well done to our Glebe wardens who set off to the local council to ask - what do you do with your old wild-flower beds at the end of the season? The answer - dump. They asked, 'Could we harvest the seeds?' YES! Fantastic - we have wild-flower seed sown all along the length of our church car park - in the verge. Fingers crossed for the spring. These flowers should be a big encouragement to the mini-beasts - the small insects - as well as our parish bees! We do have honey available from our resident beekeeper. The bees live in a corner of our grounds. Holy honey is much sought after locally!

The Rector wants to have an iPad Sunday. Can we do a service without service papers? Can we reduce our paper waste and the need for recycling. Watch this space.

We were invited to a training event run by Christian Aid looking at climate change and the response of churches. This took place in November at St John's, Orangefield and was well attended by folks from around the Greater Belfast area.

Environmentally positive suggestions for churches came thick and fast in the discussions at this meeting. We recounted our experience of moving our lighting to energy saving LED bulbs. The Glebe wardens are now going to write up that 'story' with the full facts and figures - providing a 'how to' guide to other churches. Telling the story of how we saved energy and money just by changing how we lit our building.

So that's where we are. We are enjoying our Eco-Congregation journey and would recommend it to other churches out there. It's really engaging our young people and impacting our church life and strategies.

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