



Dear Eco-Congregation Friends

Welcome to the March/April 2020 edition of the Eco-Congregation Ireland newsletter. We are in difficult times. We hope you all are well and looking after each other. Some stories to encourage us in this difficult time.

Are you interested in learning more about Eco-Congregation Ireland? Perhaps your congregation or parish has an interest in the environment and has thought about becoming an Eco-Congregation? The [Eco-Congregation Committee](#) has Catholic,

Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of Ireland and Quaker representatives on it and they are happy to come to speak to your group no matter how small! The contact details are listed at the end of this newsletter and at the above link.

Would you like to start your journey towards an Eco-Congregation Ireland Award? A good way to get started is by completing our [Environmental Check Up for Your Church!](#) Send us your completed Checklist and one of our committee will be in touch to help you move towards an application for an Eco-Congregation Ireland award.

Don't forget! ECI will award two certificates in the earlier stages of your journey towards the final Eco-Congregation Ireland Award to mark stages on the way - the Awareness Certificate and the Endeavour Certificate. [Learn more on the ECI website here.](#)



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Due to the Covid-19 crisis the ECI Climate Justice Candle Project has been suspended. We will be in touch when its journey begins again!

ECI Climate Justice Candle visits –

Lowe Presbyterian Church, Belfast

On Sunday 23rd February 2020 Lowe Church welcomed the ECI Climate Justice Candle at both morning services. This was their first 'Eco Sunday' and Joe Furphy (member of Lowe and long-time member of the ECI committee) introduced the candle to the congregation and explained why it was created and the symbolism on the candle.

To tie in with hosting the candle they were fortunate to have Helen Newell from Christian Aid speak on the issue of climate justice. She emphasised how climate change was affecting the lives and livelihoods of the world's poorest people. The focus of Christian Aid's campaign this year is climate change, 'speaking truth to power' and petitioning the government for a new deal for climate justice. The prayer room has been set up with an eco-theme, highlighting some of the countries worst affected by climate change and also challenging members to give up one plastic habit for Lent. Members felt it was a privilege to join with other churches in hosting the candle as they try to become a more eco-friendly church.



NI Caring for Creation Network

The ECI Climate Justice Candle was hosted by the NI Caring for Creation Network when they met at Knock Methodist Centre in Belfast. Report to follow!



The Margaret Aylward Centre

Noirin Lynch sent ECI this report: It was a pleasure to welcome the Eco-Congregation Ireland Climate Justice Candle to the Margaret Aylward Centre on 29 February for a special conference entitled 'Beyond a Throwaway Culture: Finding Good Questions for Faith Leaders'. This gathering was aimed at urban communities who might be unsure of how to proceed on the theme of eco-justice, particularly in economically deprived areas where the cry of the poor sometimes seemed to overwhelm the cry of the earth. We aimed to find the link between the two and to encourage leaders with resources and networks to choose small local steps that both respected people's local reality and the earth's call for healing.

The gathered group had participants from across Dublin and beyond, from parish, community groups and local services. We had excellent input from Dr Eoin O'Mahony (Geographer on urban neighbourhoods), Dr Ciara Murphy (Environmentalist with the Jesuit centre for Faith and Justice, on the connections between social justice and care for the earth), Brenda Farrell (liturgy, prayer and workshop on spirituality and nature walks), Frank Greally (Athletics Ireland ambassador for the Daily Mile) and Nadine Cunningham (teacher and gardener who has created a beautiful school garden with students).



We began and finished in prayer, and the Eco-Congregation Ireland Candle provided a beautiful centrepiece together with a local crab apple tree which was planted in our biodiversity garden in honour of the event. Each participant was given some Irish wildflower 'seedbombs' to take home with this instruction: 'We had planted our tree to grow and thrive here now we give you Irish seed bombs to take home. These seeds contain the mystery of life the energy of God with our care that energy will unfold. Under our care these seeds will grow and bloom and thrive we will become co-creators with God'. On this lovely note we went

out – to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, and to make constant small positive steps in our local area to care for our common home.



‘Hope for the Planet’ – Drumalis Spring Conference 2020

For the 18th Annual Spring Conference at Drumalis guests from all over Ireland made an emotional journey from lament to hope for the planet. Andy Lester of A Rocha UK first painted the sobering picture of where we currently stand with climate change, biodiversity loss and political justice. There is light in the darkness as people wake up and act, the passion of today’s young people a source of hope for many and ultimately God’s restorative power.

Drumalis officially launched its partnership with [A Rocha UK](#) after the arrival of Emma Johnston as Conservation Intern in January. They were also joined by Helen of DAERA, John, Keira and Roselea from XRNI, Dr Johnston McMaster, who is currently leading a public theology course at Drumalis, and Darren Houston, founder and organiser of Ballynature Day. Each of these shared their own experience of hope on a local level. Thanks were expressed to all involved in making this a challenging and inspiring weekend.



The photograph above shows the lighting of the Eco-Congregation Ireland Climate Justice Candle by Emma and Andy. Having been diligently transported by Joe Furphy of ECI, the candle served as a reminder to all, of the global impact of climate change especially on the most vulnerable aspects of life on the planet.

The photo below shows Andy Atkins presenting the ‘Environmental Certificate of Achievement’ from A Rocha to Sisters Anna and Margaret Rose on behalf of Drumalis. This presentation marks the launch of the new partnership: two groups uniting in partnership for the sake of caring for God’s Creation.



Blessington Parish

Carmel O'Neill sent ECI this report: The Climate justice candle arrived in [Blessington parish](#) in early February 2020. Following a meeting with parishioners and the parish priest and deacon, it was agreed that the candle would visit the schools in the parish and would be part of the liturgy for the sacramental masses of First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

Parishioners then contacted Sr Catherine Brennan to visit Blessington Parish and speak at the Sunday mass in Blessington and Vallemount. Her inspiring talk prompted the Communion parents to host a coffee morning in aid of the Green Wall project for the Sahara Desert. This was held on Sunday March 1st and €186 was raised. Carmel O'Neill also spoke at mass in Lacken and Vallemount to the tidy village groups and these groups were eager to hear about the contribution being made by Eco-Congregation Ireland in parishes around the country. As both these churches have green areas, it was decided to look at ways to promote biodiversity in the coming months.



The candle was also brought to the schools for a simple prayer service thanking God for the gifts of creation and expressing sorrow for failing to care for our world. In the Gaelscoil, the candle was lit in the vegetable plot and even though it was early February, there were plenty of signs of early growth in the raised beds. Throughout the month of February, the candle was placed in a sacred space displaying items on creation and lit every morning for mass. The candle was much admired on its journey through the parish and it certainly created an added awareness on the important role parishes can contribute to caring for our world.

Cork Cathedral, Cathedral of St Mary & St Anne - North Cathedral

[The Parish Climate Justice Group](#) has been affiliated to Eco-Congregation Ireland for the past two years and have received an Awareness Award last Autumn. The group has also arranged to establish links with Shandon, Church of Ireland Eco-Congregation and plan to work closely with them in the future. Parishioners arranged to host the Eco-Congregation Ireland Climate Justice Candle in the parish



St Anne's Church, Shandon

[St Anne's Church, Shandon](#) was delighted to host the ECI Climate Justice Candle for a number of weeks. The community was invited to drop in at any point to see it and to pray for our environment. They shared a prayer for use when visiting the candle.

A Prayer for Our Earth (Laudato Si)

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of
this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.



ECI Annual Review 2019 now online!

It includes ECI's highlights for 2019, including presenting awards to Parish of Tuam and Holy Faith Sisters, the journey of our Climate Justice Candle in 2019, all the ECI Awareness and Endeavour Certificates awarded in 2019, new faces in ECI in 2019 and news of the new ECI website. [Read this Annual Review here.](#)



Rev Andrew Orr appointed as an Honorary Canon of St Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork

Rev Andrew Orr, Chairperson of Eco-Congregation Ireland, has been appointed as an Honorary Canon of St Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork with Special Responsibility for a Focus on the Environment and Climate Change. In that role as Honorary Canon, Canon Orr will have responsibility, under the new arrangements governing St Fin Barre's Cathedral enacted by the General Synod in 2018, for the Fifth Mark of Mission of the [Five Marks of Mission](#) which encapsulate the common commitment of the Anglican Communion of Churches, namely:



To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

This will put environmental issues in general, and climate change in particular, to the fore of the thinking of the Diocese alongside the other four of The Five Marks of Mission. [Read in full here.](#)

Laudato Si Week 2020

2020 occasions the fifth anniversary of Laudato Si', which was signed on 24 May 2015. Join Pope Francis and take the next step in your Laudato Si' journey. Commit to an ambitious action that grows your response to 'the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.' No matter where you are in your journey, take the next step as a community during Laudato Si' Week, 16-24 May, when Catholic communities everywhere celebrate the fifth anniversary of Laudato Si'. [Visit the Laudato Si Week 2020 website](#) to learn more and access resources to help your church mark this important week!



Reading Laudato Si together with Jane Mellet, Laudato Si Officer, Trocaire

Trocaire

Have you often intended to read Laudato Si but never had the time? Would you like to re-read this important document on the environment with others? Jane Mellet is the Laudato Si Officer with Trocaire and she is offering two possibilities for us all!

- First, in Holy Week, Trocaire and Jane are offering an introduction to Laudato Si, in the context of Kenya and the Lenten campaign.
- Second Jane is offering a 6-week book club where everyone will read Laudato Si together in a small group.
- If you book a place in the book club, you'll automatically reserve a place for the Trocaire workshop which will serve as a good introduction to the topic.
- Just click this link to book your place: <https://bit.ly/39sTKst>
- Donation only, don't let money be an issue
- You'll be sent a link to a free copy of the text, so don't worry about getting a copy of it if you don't have it at home.
- No experience necessary - just in interest in the betterment of our common home!

Coming Together – Vita's First Community-Led Cook Stove Project Thrives

This Spring has put a definite spring in Vita's step as it marks the one-year anniversary of Vita's new community-led approach to fuel-efficient cookstoves in Ethiopia. This approach put rural communities in East Africa at the centre of the project and prompted people to come up with their own solutions to address the biggest issues affecting their lives. That is to say, deforestation, climate change, and dangerous cooking practices. In the past year, community members have come together and successfully introduced 100% of households to Vita's clean cooking stoves that avoided the traditional, open-fire stove that was causing such rapid tree loss. The change amongst these communities is unrecognisable with every family now using a clean and safe Vita stove that benefits their health and saves time and money collecting firewood. Best of all, this community-led approach has inspired the villages to go even further in protecting the environment and their livelihoods. Vita is currently helping them with their



request for large, communal, fuel-efficient stoves for community events like weddings, funerals and religious festivities when they have to cook for a lot of people.

Coming together to take real climate action has been an inspiring experience and Vita looks forward to bringing this approach to many more communities in the coming months. Vita will be collaborating with Dublin Libraries to host a series of workshops around this very topic from April – June – keep an eye on Vita's [website](#) for updates.



Update from the Corrymeela Community

Eleanor Duff sent ECI this update: Corrymeela's Climate Justice Group - this group of members, associates, and volunteers has come together to drive the important issue of the climate emergency forward. Within [Corrymeela's](#) statement of Commitment members are required to take responsibility for the stewardship of resources and care for creation. Thus, to raise awareness within the community, and to integrate this consciousness into the life and work of the Centre.



We were delighted to host the ECI Climate Justice Candle at the Croi last February and to continue the theme of a healthier relationship with the earth by a litter pick on our first of the Lenten walks 2019. Our prayer guide now includes daily suggestions and challenges of how to live better ecologically. Last autumn our community weekend was dedicated to the theme of the environment where we had an opening session on Active Hope to help us appreciate our surroundings with gratitude and not get overwhelmed by the topic. We then had short inputs from a panel comprising two young activists, an Environmental officer and Green party member.

There was then the opportunity for questions and discussions. Time was set aside for members to visit a variety of stands e.g. ECI, A Rocha, Christian Aid and Traidcraft providing a real link with the impact on very poor communities experiencing the brunt of climate change. Finally, we had an academic overview leaving us in no doubt that climate emergency was for real. We continue to meet every 2-3 months.

Currently the site hosts a windmill and photovoltaic panels for electricity production, as well as a polytunnel, which contributes some food for the kitchen, and can be used as an educational practical tool.

There is a wildflower meadow, bat and bird boxes and well-maintained flower beds managed by community members and volunteers.

Monaghan Group of St Louis Associates participate in Great Green Wall / Laudato Tree Project

During last September, in the Monaghan Group of St Louis Associates they celebrated Season of Creation 2019, by actively participating in the [Laudato Tree Project](#). Season of Creation began on September 1st and ended October 4th, the Feast of St. Francis. The suggested theme for 2019 was The Web of Life. They felt morally challenged by the fact that one million species are threatened by our lifestyle.

The Laudato Tree Project is an initiative of the Society of African Missions. The title Laudato Tree refers to Pope Francis' Laudato Si, Encyclical on the environment and human ecology. The project encourages the planting of native trees in Ireland in partnership with the Tree Council of Ireland and in Africa by supporting [The Great Green Wall](#) initiative of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, which aims to combat the spread of deserts in Africa.

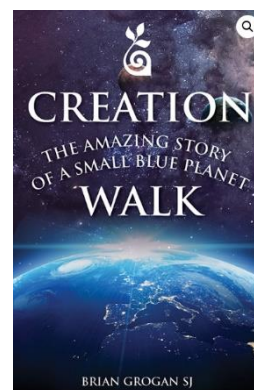


The Great Green Wall Project aims to plant an 8,000km wall of trees right across the width of the continent of Africa, from west to east, south of the Sahara Desert. The African trees that the St Louis Associates sponsored were planted on the border between Ghana and Burkina Faso and their native Irish trees were planted in Co. Kildare. A donation of €60 sponsors the planting of at least five trees in Africa and one tree in Ireland as well as enabling the training of local people in Africa for sustainable business and employment. Five million hectares of land has already been restored in Nigeria through the UN Great Green Wall Project. An African proverb inspired the St Louis Associates throughout this project with the words, 'the Earth is not a gift from our parents, it is a loan from our children'. You can see their thank you certificate above. More information from: laudato.tree@sma.ie or Mr Gerry Forde, Justice Office, SMA, Wilton, Cork T12 KR23

Creation Walk: The Amazing Story of a Small Blue Planet by Brian Grogan SJ

This book offers a unique presentation of the unfolding of our universe. It interweaves the insights of contemporary science with Christian faith and reveals the divine orchestration of the Creation Story in a dramatic, fresh and appealing way.

Brian Grogan SJ is a former President of Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy, Dublin, and is Emeritus Associate Professor of Spirituality. A best-selling author, he has devoted most of a lifetime to mining and circulating the rich treasures of Ignatian spirituality. He has also written God, You're Breaking My Heart, Finding God in a Leaf and I am Infinitely Loved, all available from [Messenger Publications](#).



Laudato Si CD/USB Special Offer

Churches and parishes may be interested in investing in these resources which could be used in eco groups or individually at home during this time of isolation.

Offer No. 1 - Living Laudato Si' and its theological, spiritual and practical application. Speakers include: Dr. Cathriona Russell TCD, Sr. Mary Kate Hagan,



Eamonn Conway, Donal Dorr, Dr. Loma Gold. Dr. Sean McDonagh SSC, Cardinal Peter Turkson. 8 cd set or USB €35.

Offer No. 2 - In your creation God finds its Joy – talk given by John Feehan. 6 cd set or USB €50.

Offer No. 3 - The call of Pope Francis Care for our common Home – Fr. Donal Dorr. 3 cd set or USB €20.

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Eco Challenge!

Rev Trevor Sargent's Ecological Notes for April 2020



Let's Celebrate Creation 50 years on from the 1st Earth Day!

Fifty years ago, the first [Earth Day](#) was celebrated in 1970. The immediate background was a UNESCO Conference on the Environment, held in San Francisco, USA, in 1969. At this event, the Irish American peace activist, John McConnell, proposed that an annual day be set aside to consider the interdependence of all life on this planet. Earth day on April 22nd, is now marked in over 190 countries and is estimated to involve over a billion people.

Earth Day and Rogationtide

As Christians, Earth Day can inspire us to prepare for Rogationtide in May, the three days before Ascension Day in the Church calendar. This relationship between Earth Day and Rogationtide was not lost on the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Revd Robert Runcie, when he spoke at ACC-8 (the 8th global Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Wales in 1990), where he said:

'In many places, the observance of Rogationtide has fallen into disuse. We hope that Churches will encourage imaginative use of this season, focusing on our responsibility for the environment'.

Celebrating the Earth in your Parish

A Rogationtide custom which brings to mind Earth Day, is called 'Beating the Bounds'. This involves all who have good walking shoes, following the boundary of the parish, blessing, (and mapping) the land, especially the trees which mark the boundary. Knowing what biodiversity lives within the parish can be called, ecological literacy. When we pray for God's creation in the context of our parish, our prayers have deeper meaning if we know what we are actually praying for. How many of us know what biodiversity lives within our parish? How many tree species? How many bird species? What is growing in the hedgerows? Liturgical material for a Rogationtide procession is provided in Common Worship: Times and Seasons (pages 614 – 18), published by Church House Publishing, London, 2006.



The following petitions are an example:

*That it may please thee to grant favourable weather,
temperate rain and fruitful seasons,
that there may be food and drink for all thy creatures,
we beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

*That it may please thee to bless the lands and the waters,
and all who work upon them,
to bring forth food and all things needful for thy people,
we beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

*That it may please thee to look with favour
upon all who care for the earth, the water and the air,
that the riches of thy creation may abound from age to age,
we beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

Coronavirus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you travelled through towns and villages curing every disease and illness. At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbours from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders.

Lord Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace.



Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know your peace.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions what will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth.

Whether we are at home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Lord Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace.

Lord Jesus Christ, heal us.

Prayers for Community in a Time of Pandemic from the Corrymeela Community

The current need for self-isolation and social distancing as exceptional measures speaks to the greater need we have as humans to be in community. The world needs community like never before. In that spirit, the [Corrymeela Community is offering a series of daily prayers](#).

God of pastures and God of lambs,
the new-born creatures of spring
know nothing of the worry
or anxiety of our last month.
They know instead of
the earth beneath them
and the sky above,
and a mother who cares for them daily.
May we in this season remind each other of
the steadiness of your providence,
the instinct in your protection,
the simplicity of your love.
And may we then with confidence
find our footing in this new-born world.
Amen.



With kindest regards,

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