



God's Welcoming Church:

Gardening with God and how the children showed us the way.....

Carolyn Good

Who am I?



- Sunday Club leader
- Secretary of the Select Vestry
- Co-Ordinator of the Environment Group
- Teacher / Principal of Carrigduff National School, in Bunclody
- Keen gardener – still learning and making mistakes!

Carlow Union of Parishes



Carlow Union facts:

- 1 Rector
- 1 Lay-Reader (about to be ordained OLM)
- 3 churches (1 urban / 2 rural)
- 1 Select Vestry
- 300 (approx.) parishioners
- 2 Community House / Parish Centre
- 1 Sunday Club with 2 Sunday Club leaders
- 1 parish school
- 1 Eco Committee with 3 people (and a supportive Rector!)

Where did we
start?



With the children.....

Our Sunday Club was set up in 2009, meeting monthly, initially in the vestry and then in the Community House. We arranged a variety of activities but noticed that gardening was very popular and more children turned up for “Wear your Wellies to Church” Sundays.

Rev. David White was instituted as Rector of Carlow Union in August 2016. He had a background in horticulture and introduced the parish to the National Pollinator Plan, starting with the children in the Sunday Club!

God's Welcoming Church Project

Formally started
in 2016



What inspired us?

- *One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "**You shall love your neighbour as yourself.**" There is no other commandment greater than these.'* (Mark 12: 28-30)
- We asked ourselves - When we think about loving our neighbour do we just think about our human neighbours? What about birds, insects, animals and plants? Through this project **we express our gratitude to God for all his creatures as we promote the wellbeing of birds and pollinators in the grounds of our churches.**
- We started with Sunday Club and the Junior Pollinator Plan

Actions



Intentional action can feel overwhelming. Environmental change is so important that it can feel too big for an individual to influence and it can be difficult to know where to start.

In the first years of our project we learned that **small changes are meaningful, concrete and inspirational.**

We started small, with small groups of people and grew. Those small actions and successes gave us confidence and bigger actions followed.

Some of the tasks undertaken were:

Actions: Sunday Club Children



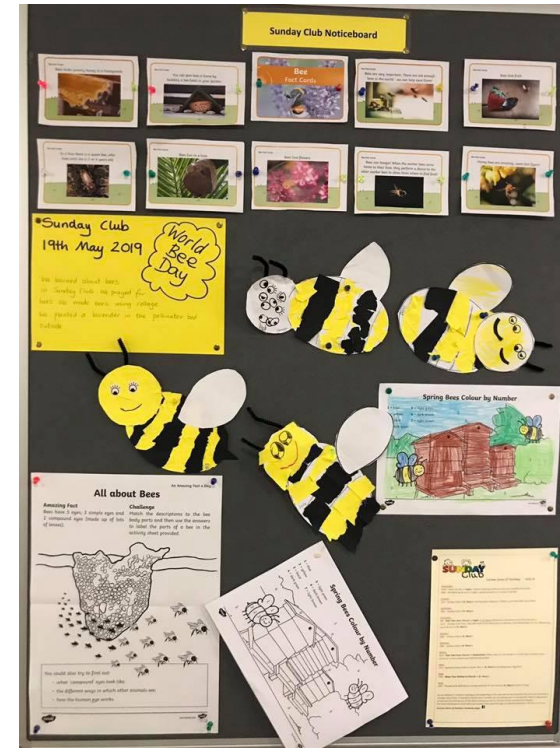
- “Wear your Wellies to Church Days” Our Sunday Club have planted seeds, bulbs and plants. They planted two Pollinator borders. Parishioners have donated plants and the Sunday Club have transplanted them into the church gardens.
- In June, at the end of the Sunday Club year we have Bouncy Sunday and a garden party for the children. We do this to celebrate the end of the Sunday Club year and to mark the children’s input in the garden.
- We regularly focus on environmental work in the Sunday Club programme. In May 2019 we marked World Bee Day. This included liturgy as part of worship, educational activities, crafts and more planting specifically for bees.
- We made recycled Christmas decorations for our Pollinator themed tree in the parish Christmas Tree Festival.

Special theme days for Sunday Club

Leading the prayers in church on World Bee Day in May 2019



The Sunday Club noticeboard lets everyone know what the children are learning!





Wear your Wellies to Church



We have gardening to do!

Sunday Club
15th September 2019
10.45

Church for kids!



Bouncy Sunday

At the end of June we say thanks to the kids



Picnic Sunday

Actions: Liturgy



- Harvest Services.
- Pet Blessing Services with invited speakers to talk about animal care.
- In our 2017 series of Advent talks, one of the talks was “Living Life in the Spirit”, with a focus on St. Francis of Assisi.
- Plough Sunday themes have focused on women in farming and the work of Bóthar.
- We developed a Prayer Walk in the grounds of St. Mary’s for adults and children to encourage reflective pilgrimage in our lovely garden. Visitors to the church enjoy the solitude and calm of the interior and we want to offer another type of solitude and calm outdoors. We secured funding from The Priorities Fund.

Experiential Prayer Walk

Pilgrimage for kids and adults

We have two prayer walks in the beautiful grounds of St. Mary's Church.

One is directed at adults and uses bible readings and hymn verses as starting points for reflection.

The children's walk asks the children to use their senses to experience God in the garden.



8. Sacred Space

This spiral is made by allowing the grass to grow longer in sections. In Spring time there are crocuses along the curling path.

- Walk slowly around the spiral.
- Think about the people in your life.
- Who brings joy to you?
- Who cares for you?
- Who protects you?
- Sit on the stone in the centre and thank God for the people you love. Say their names in your head or out loud.

Actions: Select Vestry



- When completing electrical work in the churches we switched to Energy saving LED lightbulbs where possible. We have put lights onto separate circuits so that energy can be saved.
- An Eco Committee was elected from the Select Vestry members. This group of three people (one from each church in the parish) reviewed ecological matters across the parish, registered with Eco Congregation Ireland and formulated short and long-term plans for further change to follow.
- Waste & Recycling points in all churches in the parish updated.
- New Creation & Care logo created for the parish.
- We included environmental notes and tips in parish newsletter The Vine.
- The Vine is now printed on recycled paper.

Actions: Parish School



- Children from Carlow National School regularly visit the churches in the parish. In 2019 Room 3 visited Staplestown Church and lead worship following a reading from the book of Genesis. The children acted out an adapted version of “Save the Lofty Trees: An Environmental Play”.
- Rev. David assisted the staff and pupils in our parish school Carlow NS to create a school garden including a pollinator focus. The school planted a lovely pollinator garden. The children and the staff worked on this project with support from Rev. David and a Select Vestry member who serves on the Board of Management. The parish was delighted to support this effort and to purchase a tree for the school garden.
- The school won the popular vote in the Christmas Tree Festival!



Actions: Wider Community in the parish



- Regular work parties. “Clean Up Days” for the adults ensure that small jobs are completed and foster a sense of community spirit. We usually have one a year in each of our three churches.
- We have regular gardening team work days. On these days a small number of parishioners with an interest in gardening meet with particular projects in mind. Trees have been planted in pots to create interest, planted marjoram into holes in the old tree stumps, created wood piles as natural bug hotels and hand weeding (to avoid using weedkiller). The group cleared and created a mini woodland in a corner of St. Mary’s. We painted games onto old tree stumps, put in window boxes at Community House. Rainwater harvesting barrel placed in grounds of St. Mary’s. There were bird boxes put up in Urglin. A flower bed filled with pollinator friendly plants and seating were put in Urglin Church. A pollinator bed in Staplestown Church.
- For Mother’s Day parishioners in Staplestown gave the Mums a present of a plant to grow rather than cut flowers.
- We take note of small environmental changes in our grounds such as mushrooms growing in formation and celebrate them on our parish Facebook page and on our noticeboards. This draws attention to our environment and helps the wider congregation to notice and to feel included.
- A bird bath was installed in the grounds of St. Mary’s by a parishioner with an interest in bird welfare.
- Parishioners have shared their knowledge and experience with others. Parishioners regularly open their gardens to those wishing to learn more.
- Parishioners take part in Christian Aid hike in Slieve Bloom mountains at Clonaslee Co. Laois and on the Sheep’s Head Peninsula in Co. Cork.
- Mothers’ Union invite Bishop Burrows to plant a cherry tree to mark the 100th anniversary of the Carlow / Killeshin Branch.

Actions: Community House & Parish Centres



- Community House / Parish Centre
- A large noticeboard was installed in the Community House to keep parishioners up to date on global, national and local environmental matters.
- Water barrel and compost bin put into the garden in St. Mary's along with directions in the Community House as to where compostable materials can go.
- Community House used by Carlow County Council to host "Willow Workshop" marking National Tree Week.
- We switched to recycled paper for toilet paper in the Community House.
- Use of Fairtrade products in the kitchen.
- Rev. David lead workshops in the Community House and grounds for Carlow Mental Health Week.



Actions: Wider Community in Carlow



- A number of parishioners attended Pollinator and Recycling Workshops organised by Carlow County Council.
- We have worked closely with the local Men's Shed to create a bug hotel and to provide sturdy and comfortable seating in our church grounds.
- We worked closely with local Councillors to provide informative and historical noticeboards outside Urglin and Staplestown churches, encouraging visitors to linger and to visit.
- Video launched at General Synod in Derry with advice for parishes on ecological actions. The work of Carlow Union and Rev. David White feature in the short video.
- We have secured funding from Carlow County Council and The Priorities Fund to further develop our God's Welcoming Church Project.
- We have entered competitions bringing attention, and more visitors to our project.



Motivation, inspiration and perseverance



It's not about prizes but
acknowledgment helps!

Motivation to keep going, to get more
people involved and more funding.

Like a plant with a little attention, the
project grows!



In our parish work



- We always knew that a variety of God's creatures would be made welcome through this project. It was interesting to note that a number of visitors to our churches saw a role for themselves in environmental action and became regular members of our congregation. This project opened a door for bugs, birds, animals, plants, and of course for humans.
- We have a focus on children
- We are constantly reflecting
- We are constantly learning
- We aspire to protect and perfect what we have, and to do more, to be more
- We have hope!

My top tips!



1. Start small. Pick easy and achievable tasks to do first.
2. Use the Pollinator Plan or the Eco Congregation Check Up as a starting point.
3. Avoid lots of paperwork and no committees initially. The right 2 people can often achieve more than the wrong 8.
4. Be clear what support you need from the Rector / Select Vestry / congregation and ask for it.
5. Start with the children and bring the adults with you on your parish journey. Adults can't resist excited kids!
6. Reach out to Community Groups and to people who can help eg the Mens' Shed, and the Council Environmental Awareness Officer.
7. Enter a few competitions and advertise on the way. It helps morale and helps you to reflect.
8. Have fun!

