



Dear Friends of Eco-Congregation Ireland

Welcome to the Advent 2021 edition of the Eco-Congregation Ireland newsletter! The ECI Committee wishes everyone a peaceful and safe Advent and a blessed Christmas. If you have any information or stories you would like to share in our future newsletters, we would love to hear from you! Send them to info@ecocongregationireland.com.

ECI Northern Online Gathering – 4 December 2021!

On Saturday 4 December 2021 Eco-Congregation Ireland held its first regional online gathering. This first gathering brought together friends from across the northern part of the country. You can now watch the this online event on the [ECI YouTube channel here](#). The speakers' talks are available to read here: [Ken Orr, Newtownbreda Presbyterian Church, Belfast](#); [Kerry Nicholson, South Belfast Quaker Meeting](#); [Sr Margaret Rose McSparran, Drumalis Retreat and Conference Centre, Larne, Co Antrim](#).

SAVE THE DATE! ECI's next online gathering is for the **Leinster region** and will take place on Saturday 12 February 2022, 10.30am – 12.00pm.



ECI Climate Justice Candle is on the Move Again!!

The ECI Climate Justice Candle is on the move again! If your church or faith community would like to host the candle all you have to do is drop a line to info@ecocongregationireland.com and we will arrange to get the candle safely to you. We are looking forward to seeing the candle in different locations around the country and hearing about how you use it to raise awareness of climate justice!

ECI Climate Justice Candle Visits ...

Lowes Presbyterian Church, Belfast

Rachel Quigley sent ECI this report: On Sunday 14th November 2021 Lowes Presbyterian Church in Finaghy held a Climate Sunday Service. We were delighted to have big turnout to this evening service, with our regular congregation and a lot of new faces too. After COP26 I think we all needed a bit of encouragement and there was a real sense of God's presence as we listened to our excellent guest speaker, Rev Dr Allen Sleith and worshipped God together. As part of our service we welcomed the ECI Climate Justice Candle and were fortunate to have Lowes Member and ECI representative, Joe Furphy, to explain its symbolism and significance. It really was wonderful to see God's people come together with a common concern for His Creation and very real consequences of climate change.



Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish, Johnstown, Killiney

The ECI Climate Justice Candle was displayed and lit in the church on Saturday and Sunday 20 and 21 November, 2021. Approximately 500 parishioners attended the 3 Masses. Sr. Margo Delaney of Bonnybrook kindly spoke for a few minutes at each of the Masses. They also had a Climate Action Tree and all present were invited to write on a label, an action which they promise to take to alleviate the climate crisis, and to hang it on the tree. Bonnybrook Parish Eco Aware Group responded to an invitation from Our Lady of Good Council, Johnstown, to speak at their Sunday liturgies, with a view to inspiring the parishioners to continue the journey towards becoming an eco-aware parish. Everyone felt it was a privilege to be with them as they welcomed the Eco-Congregation Ireland Climate Justice Candle. [Read more here.](#)



Galway Diocese

The Galway Diocese COP26 Prayer Service took place in Galway Cathedral on Thursday 28 October 2021. Led by Bishop Brendan Kelly, with an address by Jane Mellett of Trócaire. The service was enhanced by the presence of Eco-Congregation Ireland's Climate Justice Candle. [You can view the service here.](#)



Church of Ireland Theological Institute

The Eco-Congregation Ireland Climate Justice Candle visited the Church of Ireland Theological Institute in Dublin on Tuesday 2nd November 2021 for a Service of the Word with prayer for the COP26 conference in Glasgow. During the Service in the CITI Chapel, prayers were offered for the Anglican Consultative Council delegation which recently gained accreditation as an Observer Non-Governmental Organisation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This means that, for the first time, the Anglican Communion as a whole can participate at COP26. Pictured left to right in the above photo with the Climate Justice Candle:



Rev Philip McKinley, Rev Martin Steele, Caroline Brennan, Rev Jean Carney, Rev Johnny Lowden and David van der Ziel.

Hillsborough Presbyterian Church, Co Down

The ECI Climate Justice Candle visited Hillsborough Presbyterian Church on Sunday 17th October 2021 for their Harvest Thanksgiving service. The photo on the right shows Rev Allen Sleith, minister of Hillsborough Presbyterian Church and Presbyterian representative on the ECI committee.



ECI Awareness and Endeavour Certificates 2021: St George's Parish, Belfast has received its ECI Awareness Certificate. Well done everyone!

Awards! Awards!

Westport Eco-Congregation Receives ECI Gold Award

The journey of Westport's Gold Award started seven years ago, with numerous projects and many people's assistance, passion and efforts along the way. It is a celebration for the parishes to reach a milestone such as this! Westport Eco-congregation heard in March that they had been successful in their application and would be one of three Gold Award recipients in Ireland in 2021. To mark the presentation of the Gold Award to Westport Eco Congregation, two beautiful apple trees were planted on the green area – left of the slip road between Rice College and Knockranny in Westport. The planting took place on Tuesday 5th of October and the sun shone gloriously as Pat Fahy and members of Westport Eco-Congregation dug the ground and planted the trees! [You can read more on this story on the ECI website here.](#) The above photo shows members of the Westport Eco-Congregation presenting the ECI Gold Award to Holy Trinity at the recent Harvest Festival. (L to R: Mary Berkery, Kathleen Murphy, Rev Canon Jenefer Whirter, Maighr  ad Costello, Kathleen Friel, Brid McAuley, Caroline Goucher and Kevin Barrett.)



Presentation Sisters Receive their ECI Award!

In early June 2021 the North Eastern and South Western provinces of the Presentation Sisters celebrated the reception of their ECI awards via zoom. The ceremony had been planned as a national gathering in June 2020 but it had to be postponed due to Covid. Rather than postpone the event again they celebrated via zoom. The entire report on the work of the Presentation family could stand as a template for other larger organisations seeking a model to follow. It is wide ranging in its concerns, many of them concerns the Sisters and the Presentation family have been articulating for a long time. In the past two decades however, these concerns have been brought into sharper focus for them by the setting of the Millenium Development goals and more recently by Laudato Si' and by the Sustainable Development Goals. [Read the report in full on their work on the ECI website here.](#)



Updates ...

Planting Trees Across the Irish Jesuit Province

On October 4th, to mark the end of the Season of Creation and coinciding with National Tree Day, communities, schools and works across the Irish Jesuit Province were planting trees. At Gardiner Street Parish, local school children enthusiastically helped to plant a tree and spring flowering bulbs in the walled garden of the Gardiner Street Jesuit Community. Read more about the event [here](#).



Bonnybrook Eco-Aware Parish: Acting Together in Hope

Margo Delaney sent ECI this update: **COP 26: COP 26 Oak Tree:** At our daily liturgies from October 31st to November 12th we prayed for world leaders that they might have the vision, conviction, and courage to commit to strong actions to address climate crisis and loss of biodiversity. Now, we will contact our local politicians to support and urge them to implement these commitments, knowing that our voice counts. As a sign of hope, we planted an oak tree in the parish church grounds. The sapling, donated by a parishioner, was blessed, and named "COP26 Tree of Hope".



Beginning Again: Re-forming Our Care for the Earth Ministry Group: COVID 19 lockdowns had a severe impact on all our ministry groups. Within the renewal of ministries schedule, Care for the Earth Ministry Group met on November 23rd. Dympna Mallon, who has wide experience in promoting ecological justice with the SMA and Jesuit societies, put fresh heart into our newly formed group of eight. Now we have new plans and interesting ideas to help us move forward.



Advent: Our Pledging Tree: Focusing the theme of awakening, we have repurposed our Lenten Tree as a Pledging Tree. Parishioners are invited to make a pledge to take one concrete action that will lessen their carbon footprint and help redress the devastation of our planet. A guide and inspiration poster, together with labels on which to write their pledges, are placed at the foot of the tree.

Outreach to Others: Bonnybrook Parish Eco Aware Group responded to the invitation from Our Lady of Good Council, Johnstown, to speak at their Sunday liturgies, with a view to inspiring the parishioners to continue the journey towards becoming an eco-aware parish. It was a privilege to be with them as they welcomed the Eco-Congregation Ireland Climate Justice Candle.

Parishioners' Interest and Generosity: One of the valuable outcomes from creating an awareness of the need to appreciate the gift of our beautiful world is the generous sharing of shrubs, bulbs and cuttings by parishioners. What might otherwise have been considered waste, is now brought for planting along the church boundary fence. The photograph below shows this work in progress.

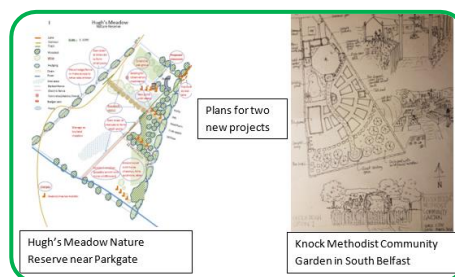


We intend to take two key statements from Dympna Mallon's motivational talk to our Care for the Earth Ministry Group to guide us as we work towards being recognised as a Gold Eco-Congregation Ireland Parish:

*Everything is interconnected and interdependent
Everything we do has consequences for each other, for our earth
And for sisters and brothers whose lives are being devastated
By climate crises and loss of biodiversity.*

Northern Ireland Creation Care Network Holds 17th Meeting!

Bertie Stirling sent ECI this report: The NI Creation Care Network had their 17th meeting in Drumalis on Saturday 20th November. The meeting was opened with a prayer for reconnection and reconciliation with God and his creation. Though numbers were small, exchange was exciting and encouraging. Of course COP26 and the Climate Justice Rally in Belfast were topics of conversation, both with their good and bad sides. A number of people also attended the Climate Justice Service in Central Church that morning.



Encouragement for all was when we exchanged what folks were involved in day by day, week by week. We learned of two more congregations starting to take positive action to care for God's creation. Many new initiatives had popped up since we last met: Repair Cafes had opened up again; creation care was becoming a more regular topic in Bible studies and sermons; two new local initiatives where farmers were rewilding part of their land. We also heard about more schemes alongside Forest Schools, to raise awareness among young people. Other projects – from developing an interfaith programme bringing people together through creation care to planting 2000 trees, were discussed. Many tips, suggestions and contacts were also exchanged. Folks in the group were involved in so many activities that they just felt were worth doing. It reminded me of part of a quote from Vaclav Havel (Former President of the Czech Republic) - 'Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.' The meeting ended with an excellent meal together, provided by Drumalis and we express much thanks for this.

Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish, Johnstown, Killiney Season of Creation

Geraldine Murphy sent ECI this update: During Season of Creation, the Justice and Peace Group made an effort to highlight the need to change our ways as individuals and as parish, in order to protect our wonderful planet Earth. Fr. John Sinnott, spoke about Creation and Biodiversity; prayers for creation were spoken from the altar and were included in our parish newsletter.



On Sunday, 3rd October, we invited Justin Kilcullen from the neighbouring Shankill Parish, which has received a Gold Award from Eco-Congregation Ireland, to speak to us about biodiversity and our Christian duty, not option, to care for the Earth. We offered pollinator-friendly Muscari (Grape Hyacinth) and Allium bulbs to all parishioners leaving the church after the three Masses on 3rd October. We asked them to plant these in their gardens or window boxes, etc. We will also plant some on our church grounds. On Wednesday, 6th October, we had a small gathering of six parishioners, plus Fr. John, as a follow on from Justin Kilcullen's excellent talk. We will visit Shankill's group Shankill Action for a Green Earth and hope to learn from their experiences in order to become an Eco-Congregation. We also spoke of starting a Laudato Si study group.

Orlagh-in-the-City

Some members of the Laudato Si' Eco Group attended the demonstration in Dublin during COP26 which called on governments to take urgent action to address climate change. Mary Robinson's comments subsequent to the COP highlighted how major greenhouse gas producing countries prevented a more ambitious outcome. Clearly there is a lot more work to be done. The book club has just finished reading Dermot Lane's excellent *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue*. Before starting Sean Mc Donagh's *Robots, Ethics and the Future of Jobs* the group decided to explore the inspirational nature of poetry. The following are lines from Francis of Assisi's poem, *Does Every Creature Have a Soul?*



*Does every creature have a
soul?
surely they do; for anything God has touched
will have life
forever,
and all creatures He
has held.*

Corrymeela Climate Justice Group

Glenise Morgan sent ECI this update: there has been quite a lot of activity, despite the Covid19 restrictions affecting the Ballycastle Centre.

Cop26: Several members of the group attended the Prayer and Climate Justice event organised by Christian Aid, Tearfund and others in Belfast before joining the Climate Coalition NI march on 6 November. A number of members attended, and contributed to the COP26 event in Glasgow, including one of our members, Zand Craig, who provided a video link on his work with the World Green Building Council.



A number of members have been attending the Laudato Si seminars hosted by St Colmcilles Parish.

Climate Conference for Chaplains: Cheryl Meban, Chaplain at Ulster University, Coleraine, is organising an all-Ireland conference for university and college chaplains on Climate Justice in January. Our leader, Alex Wimberley, will be one of the speakers and the group will be visiting the Ballycastle Centre.

Public Theology Appointment: A new Public Theology post has been created at Corrymeela and Jonny Clarke, who worked with an environmental group in Rostrevor, County Down, has been appointed. Johnny talked to us about his role, recognising the link between his future work and climate justice. We warmly welcome him and look forward to working together.

Corrymeela and Covid19: At the recent Corrymeela AGM, it was noted that, although Covid19 restrictions had led to the Ballycastle Centre being essentially closed to visitors and programme participants for 14 months, with the consequent reduction in income, this had also created an opportunity to review policies and programmes, carry out risk assessments and maintain the centre – with the help of a dedicated group of gardening volunteers. It is now ready to welcome people into a safe and attractive environment and Corrymeela's supporters have stepped forward with some very generous donations. Working on-line, some 762 people were supported over the year, mainly from marginalised communities. One successful initiative was liaising with the local Foodbank, to send out around 1,600 hot meals prepared by the kitchen staff. It was noted that one of Corrymeela's strengths is the sense of well-being which is generated by the welcoming atmosphere and soothing environment at the Centre's lovely location.

Carrigaline Union of Parishes

Two heritage apple trees were recently planted in the church grounds of St Mary's Carrigaline. Parishioners were delighted that they had been sourced from Irish Seed Savers in Co Clare. Irish Seed Savers Association (<https://irishseedsavers.ie/>) maintains the country's only public seed bank, with over 600 non-commercially available varieties of seed. Irish Seed Savers house the national collection of Irish heritage apple trees in their orchards, with over 180+ unique varieties.



Blessington and Lacken Parish

Carmel O'Neill sent this latest news from Blessington and Parish: To mark the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, a prayer service was held in Blessington church to honour the life of St Francis who inspires us with his profound love and respect for Creation. Pastoral worker Aine reflected on the life of St Francis and did a meditation on how to care for the Earth's natural resources, air, wind, earth and water. Fr Richard displayed two beautiful pictures of Brother Sun and Sister Moon in the Sacred space while a member of the pastoral council read the Canticle of the Sun where St Francis invites all of Creation to give honour and praise to the Lord.





Gaelscoil na Lochanna invited Deacon Gerry and Pastoral worker Aine to a prayer service in their vegetable garden located on the school grounds. The children planned a 3 course menu from the vegetables they had sown in the plot in the Spring. They also decorated the wall of the garden with autumn leaf collages. The prayer service was held outdoors in glorious sunshine prior to the mid term break. The good weather added to a deep sense of gratitude for the blessing of food that came from their vegetable plot.

The mass of harvest thanksgiving was held in Lacken Church on Oct 30th. The First Holy Communion children and children from the Tidy Village group brought up gifts symbolising the fruits of the harvest. Prayers were said in thanksgiving for all who work hard to put food on the table and for

the efforts of the tidy Village group to promote bio diversity. A prayer was also included for an end to the pandemic.

Throughout the month of November, Lacken Tidy village group planted 1,200 spring bulbs on a long verge at the entrance to the village. Earlier in the summer two further verges were planted with bee pollinator plants. All of the houses have signed up to having their verges planted, where previously these areas would have been strimmed in the summer months. We hope that these beautiful verges will encourage the homeowners to help with their maintenance as well as enjoying the healthy outdoor activity. [Read this report in full on the ECI website here.](#)



Parish of Springfield, Fettercairn, Jobstown & Brookfield

Maureen Fergusion sent ECI this update: **Creation Time:** The Pope's Prayer for Our Common Home was recited during every Mass in each of the four churches. **Handout:** A four page leaflet was distributed in all churches with ideas for moving towards 'Zero Waste', suggestions for autumn planting for pollinators and of course a highlight on COP 26 and the Catholic Petition. **Ecumenical effort:** The above prayer and handout were shared with our Church of Ireland and Methodist neighbours. **Harvest Festival:** Our Harvest Festival, which took place in St. Mark's, Springfield, this year, was a very enjoyable respite during covid restrictions. There was a focus on the Sharing of Gifts, so over the weekend there were displays of the many ways volunteers share their time and skills with the community. The Climate Justice display again urged people to sign the Catholic Petition. A highlight was the Blessing of Animals and among the usual cats and dogs a pair of ferrets made their presence felt! **An Eco Friendly Christmas:** The climate is changing and so must we! In a drive to "Make Christmas as eco-friendly and litter-free as possible". Leaflets are being distributed after all Masses with reminders to Reject, Reduce, Refuse, Repurpose, Recycle with a focus on the choices we make when buying and wrapping gifts and purchasing food and 'extras' for Christmas. [Read Maureen's report in full on the ECI website.](#)



Opening liturgy



Blessing of animals



Including two ferrets



Sharing food

Stormont Presbyterian Church and St Colmcilles Parish Church, Ballyhackamore – Our COP26 Weekend

Rosemary Hunter shared this report: During COP26 in Glasgow, Stormont Presbyterian Church together with St Colmcille's Parish Church, Ballyhackamore arranged a tree planting at the Billy Neill Country Park (just off the Comber Greenway) on the Saturday afternoon. 100 tree saplings, which had been grown from seed by a member of the church were planted on the hillside in the park by family members from both churches. We were supported by Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council.



On the Sunday, a morning service was held at Stormont Church on the theme "What can we do? – What we can do." This service was addressed by Rosamund Bennett of Christian Aid, who highlighted the impact of climate change on communities in parts of Africa and Bangladesh and the devastation this is causing to the livelihoods of these communities. Prayers were led by members of both congregations.

Stormont Presbyterian had invited our locally elected representatives to the service, and were pleased that 6 elected members attended – these included our MP, some MLAs and councillors from all the parties represented in this part of Belfast. At coffee after the service, there was an opportunity to talk to the representatives, not least about the two climate change bills under consideration by the Assembly. [Click here to view their photos.](#)

Diocese of Limerick and the Salesian Cosmology Group

The Diocese of Limerick and the Salesian Cosmology Group have established an Inter-Diocesan Laudato Si' Movement. The Movement is Chaired by Sr Betty Baker of the Salesian Cosmology Group and involves representatives from the Dioceses of Limerick, Killaloe, Cashel & Emly, Kerry and Ossory. The group first met in August to share ideas and resources on the Season of Creation. Daily quotations and practical ideas of action were shared on the Diocese of Limerick Facebook throughout the Season of Creation.



The Diocese of Limerick, in partnership with the Salesian Cosmology Group and the Diocese of Ossory broadcast a 'Moment of Reflection' event live on Facebook on the 1st of September to launch the Season of Creation. People were invited to take some time to reflect on the importance of caring for our common home and how we can each make a difference. The event can be viewed [at this link](#).



The group met again in October to review the Season of Creation and to plan a Cosmic Walk which was held on the 6th of November in Cabragh Wetlands. The Cosmic Walk provided a wonderful opportunity for the group and their invited guests to hear and reflect on our Creation Story. The group were so inspired by the passion with which Michael Long and Tom Gallagher from Cabragh Wetlands Trust shared the story. The group reflected on how they experienced the walk and explored practical ideas on how we can all play our part in caring for our common home.

Their November meeting focused on preparing for Christmas and in particular sharing and exploring ideas for celebrating an eco-Christmas. As part of a series of online Christmas Reflections, on

Wednesday 15th December, Sr Betty Baker will offer a reflection on 'Creation Connections at Christmas' which will invite people to look at how we connect with family, faith and nature. People are very welcome to join us, you can register for the series at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Christmas_Reflections. Details on the poster on the left.

The Loving Earth Project is Coming to Ireland!

The Loving Earth project is coming to Ireland in March and April 2022. The Loving Earth Project is a textile project started by Quakers, celebrating people, places, creatures, and other things that we love but which are threatened by growing environmental breakdown. It offers a way to help people engage creatively and constructively with the issues. It started in Britain Yearly Meeting and has spread across the globe to other Yearly Meetings and crafters and environmental groups.



Some Friends in South Belfast Quaker Meeting were introduced to this during lockdown in spring 2020 and several Friends including children and young people have made panels and contributed to the overall exhibition. **Can you help?** Volunteers are needed to promote and host the exhibition. [Please read this flyer](#) from the organisers to learn how you can get involved.

Publications of Interest ...

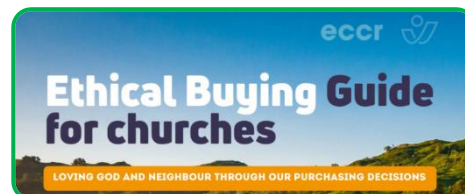
Perils of Climate Change by Seán McDonagh

A timely alert to the issue of our climate crisis from one of Ireland's leading advocate for understanding this crisis. Seán McDonagh is a Columban priest, and organises many courses in Dalgan Park. You can read this article on the [Messenger Publications website here](#).



Ethical Buying Guide for Churches

The latest resource from ECCR's (The Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility) Money Makes Change programme – an Ethical Buying Guide for churches – equips churches to take practical steps with their spending to shape a fairer, more sustainable world. Purchasing decisions churches make have an impact on the world but what do we know about where and how those items were made? What do we know about the companies we buy from? The resource addresses a range of ethical issues, including caring for creation. With discussion questions, case studies and top tips for forming an ethical purchasing policy, the resource can be used to reflect and take action in your church. Find out more and download the resource from the [ECCR website](#).



Sean McDonagh SSC – Homily for the Feast of St Columban

Fr Sean McDonagh preached the homily at an ecumenical service at Bangor Abbey on November 23rd, the Feast of St Columban. [You can read the homily here](#).

Eco Challenge!

Advent Wreath by Rev Andrew Kingston

I came to a deeper understanding of the symbolism of the Advent Wreath when trimming the Manse holly tree in Donnybrook a couple of days ago. The thought came to me that the prickly leaves could be useful. I don't like using slug tox as birds eating slugs killed by those



chemicals can be poisoned. In my experience the organic substitutes aren't much use – and besides, these pesticides dissolve in rainfall and have to be regularly replenished.

However, it is really annoying when a newly emerged luscious seedling like a courgette, or a runner bean is devoured in one of two nibbles of a big fat slug. I had a brainwave when I looked at the vicious thorns on the holly. How would it be if I threaded holly leaves onto a string in order to make a defensive barrier? I found a shoe eye punch, and put a hole in each leaf; tied a fine nail to the end of a piece of string and threaded the leaves together. As I did so the significance of the Advent Wreath dawned on me. Those wreaths, complete with blood red berries are a reminder of the crown of thorns pressed onto the brow of the King of Kings.



I picked a passion fruit off the ground in the magnificent gardens attached to the Museum of Modern Art in Kilmainham a few months ago and am surprised to find that they have already germinated. The Passion fruit gets its name from the five stamens on the passion flower and is a reminder of the five wounds of Christ on the cross. Christmas should not be divorced from Easter. We remember the coming (and Second Coming) of our Lord Jesus Christ during the Advent Season; but Jesus came to die. He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are

healed". My passion flower seedling is now protected by a hedge of holly leaves. Both are reminders of the real significance of Advent.

Carlow Church of Ireland Eco Noticeboards

Has your faith community ever thought of creating an eco noticeboard? Carlow Church of Ireland has these wonderful noticeboards where they display all sorts of eco information for their parishioners to browse. Their Sunday Club's board often has an special theme. The one below was to celebrate World Bee Day.



Rev Trevor Sargent's Ecological Notes for Advent 2021 – Celebrating Christmas While Avoiding the Accumulation of More 'Stuff'.

I wonder do the 'Wise Men' have a case to answer by providing some ethical cover for the frenzy of consumerism in the modern run up to Christmas. In their defence, the most precious gifts (as I see it) which the Magi brought to the Baby Jesus was their love and respect, their time, their gratitude, and three highly symbolic gifts, not wanting to turn up empty handed. As far as we can tell, the gold, frankincense and myrrh were gratefully received by Mary and Joseph, on behalf of Jesus. I'm not aware of any strong oral tradition which says that the gifts were retained in a vault, or that Jesus carted them around in a satchel. Perhaps these precious gifts were sold to buy another donkey for the flight to Egypt, or in exchange for food for the journey, or given in thanks to the innkeeper for the emergency accommodation. Nowadays it is the impacts of climate change, conflict and Covid-19, as opposed to King Herod, which are forcing poor people to take their babies and leave home.





Giving gifts to a poor family fleeing persecution is quite timely! Organizations like Christian Aid are offering us Christmas shoppers helpful and beautiful gifts which mean we can show our love for a family member, or a friend, while at the same time, this gift can help a present day 'Mary and Joseph' to provide for their stressed out family, and build up resilience so they can make a life where they are living.

Reach out to people in poverty by buying a charity gift - Dee Huddleston, the Church and Community Officer at Christian Aid Ireland says: *Charity Gifts are a way supporters can provide people with the means to change their lives for better, helping children to stay safe and grow up healthy, helping families to use animals or other gifts such as a weaving loom to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. Helping*

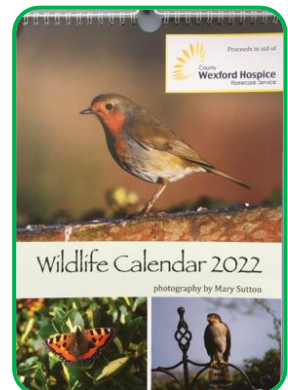
communities adapt to the climate crisis with some seeds or saplings that are more climate resistant. Many of the gifts give women an opportunity to build new lives for themselves or to find a safe place and counselling as a survivor of domestic or gender based violence. Through these gifts, people have the power to transform the lives of people in many of the communities that Christian Aid works alongside and for that support we have very, very grateful. Find out more by logging on to charity-gifts.christianaid.ie.



When you order a Christian Aid Charity Gift, a printed greeting card is sent to you which includes a description and picture of your chosen gift, e.g. an emergency shelter, a goat, a cow, a beehive, or a receipt showing your gift has allowed a child to have schooling. You can then give this printed card as a gift to a loved one. You can also opt to receive an e-card instead of a printed charity gift card.

I also like to buy locally made charity cards and calendars. Many local charities offer very attractive gifts such as packs of cards or an illustrated calendar at this time of year. One such calendar which all at once, beautiful, ecological and raises money for a very good cause is the County Wexford Hospice Homecare Service calendar pictured to the right.

This was a Transition Year Project by Holly Rothwell and Sara Williamson, who are students at FCJ Secondary School in Bunclody. The wildlife photography by Mary Sutton is exquisite.



The gift that cannot be given, only received - In the midst of all this anxiety about being ethical, and choosing the right gift for a loved one, it is worth asking, 'what did the Magi from the east receive from Jesus?' They received something far more valuable than their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. They received God's loving Son, Jesus Christ, the hope of the world, the gift of grace, who takes away the sins of the world, and shows us the way to bring about His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. As with all good gifts, sometimes the only thing to do, is to say, 'thank you'!

Prayers/Reflections for the Earth

A Prayer by Rev Allen Sleith, Presbyterian Representative on the ECI Committee

Living God, Creating Spirit, as the hosts of heaven sing with angelic voice, so we, the creatures of your beloved creation, sing your praises too. You are the Source of all that is: calling being out of nothing; shaping order out of chaos; making this marvellous web of worldwide life that even the most up-to-date science can only faintly comprehend.



For millenia now, this has been our earthly home – terra firma: stable enough to ground us safely; provision enough to meet our daily needs; and more than enough beauty to stir our souls and delight our senses.

Such abundant blessing goes far beyond any notion of earning and deserving, for all this is your free gift: bounty that showers upon us from your generous heart, your outstretched arms, your open hands.

And yet, all this splendour so often meets with a paltry, pitiful response. Instead of wonder and awe, we remain locked up in our narrow concerns. Instead of respect and care, we pull and plunder, we tear asunder, the delicate weave, the very fabric of life. Instead of the will to appreciate and reciprocate your Holy Spirit at work in the world, ours, we confess, is an alien agenda, doing largely as we please, without heed to the dire depletion of our planet's resources, the exhaustion of ecosystems, the suffocation of this beloved but beleaguered earth.

Dear God, open our eyes to see how we are despoiling your glory; open our ears to hear your necessary truth; open our hearts to receive that forgiveness which your Son has granted, and that renewal which your Spirit still empowers, so that even at this late hour, we may return to our senses, and revere this world, our beloved home, as a place of blessed shalom. Amen.

Two Reflections by Fr Hugh O'Donnell – 'Planet Dancing'

According to Hafiz, the Sufi mystic, God knows only four words and keeps repeating them; 'come dance with me'. Such an invitation should not seem strange coming from the great Mover and Shaker whose nature is dance, who sets creation dancing.

Earth spins as it goes on its annual journey around the sun, our parent star, (something quite impossible to conceive while we held earth to be the centre of everything). And stars must feel their planets and sense the allure of other stars and galaxies, all choreographed in space time.

The whirling dervishes of the Sufis understand something of this for they twirl and wheel to express their ecstatic communion with the Divine who is dancing in them. Most of us opt for a more static God who moves rather stiffly through his kingdom and is not much fun. By contrast, one of the earliest images we have of the divine is of a threesome dancing together with heaven and earth an extension of that original ballet.

A dancing world makes sense to us, embodied as nourishment, affirmation, diversity. One day, hopefully, a parliament will stand up before the order of business and begin to sway together, moving as one body. And the praying congregation begin to dance, having 'got it' at last, that God is the dancer, creation the dance as young and old join hands on a World Dance Day to celebrate our being here, falling into step with every other dancing life form, from hydra to hippo!

A Soft Place to Fall

There is the donkey who appears to our imagination in a Bethlehem stable and the one who walks in the Jerusalem parade amid cheering fans. And another placed centre stage in a painting by Orazio Gentileschi - the large head looking over the exhausted family resting on their way to Egypt, the baby suckling and Joseph stretched out on the ground – who could be saying, 'don't forget about the one who carries them'...

To a Father who notices the fall of a sparrow, the ass is more than 'a dumb beast'. He, too, is loved by the Father who suffers, in some way, with all his creatures, including those we lord it over, oblivious of how in our keeping they are often mistreated and misunderstood.

In contrast there's the story of [Elisabeth Svendsen](#). Little did she know when in 1969 she decided to buy a donkey named Naughty Face that her heart would be blown open by seeing other neglected donkeys for sale; that she would found a worldwide sanctuary movement to care for thousands more just like them;



and found a Trust that would create opportunities for children with special needs to bond with these loving friends.

And there's Brian, who, after his awful accident, liked nothing better than to drive down in his chair to sit and gaze and talk to his two donkeys, Tess and Bess, his affinity with them deepened perhaps by his own sense of confinement and their still and attentive presence. They understood. (Above photo from the Donkey Sanctuary, Ireland).

Fikadu's Story

Eritrea can be hot and dry, and has very little groundwater to speak of – and so the communities in this mountainous, beautiful but arid sliver of a country on East Africa's Red Sea are both keen and quick to embrace any opportunity that creates access to clean water.

All over this region, community water points are broken and with no access to spare parts or resources, communities have to revert to the ancient and desperately unsafe task of fetching water from open and dirty water sources such as small streams or ponds shared with local livestock.



Fikadu Demoz, who lives with her family in Ksad Dalwo Village, Dubarwa was fed up of walking three or more kilometres a day to get water for cooking and for her family to drink and wash themselves. This dirty water had to be boiled before it was safe to drink, which meant Fikadu or her children spent most of their time fetching water and gathering sticks to boil it.

"I was always rushing, rushing. Always getting water and trying to get the food cooked. It took up so much of my time, there was no time for other things. I had to bring my son Abraham with me to get the water every day. He gets very tired and he wants to stop and play with three other children often but we did not have time," says Fikadu. "Sometimes I was so busy I had to send my daughter to get the water and then she would miss some of school." Fikadu really missed spending time with her sister Genait and catching up on all the local news. She felt isolated and was fed up with always working and never relaxing.

Last year, [Vita](#) partnered with the community as they fixed their old water point which is now functional and providing safe, clean water for approximately 1,500 people in the village and surrounding hills. Each of the water points that gets fixed through the Vita programme serves approximately 100 hundred families, and that saves a lot of wood from being burnt to boil water. In fact, each well saves about 1,000 tonnes of carbon emissions each year, and each tonne saved is called a carbon offset. Vita has partnered with communities like Fikadu's in Eritrea and many more in Ethiopia to sell the carbon offsets that they generate. This directly supports the communities as they drive their own development as well as facilitating the transition to a more sustainable future.

"Now the water point is just a short walk from my compound and I meet my sister there every day," says Fikadu. "Our children play and run around and I hear all the funny stories from our village. We laugh a lot when we are together!"

What Did You Do in the Great Climate Crisis Daddy?

John Stothers from Knock Methodist Church in Belfast reflects: At the time of writing this piece we were remembering those who had fought in the two world wars so that our children could have a better future. Today many are losing their lives and livelihoods due to another world crisis and indeed the battle for our children's futures is gathering momentum.

When Cop26 started on Saturday the 6th of November, Christian Aid, Tearfund, Evangelical Alliance, and 24/7 Prayer called all Christians for a time of prayer at



Central Church in May Street, Belfast. Prayers were lifted up and the information that we were given about the poorest countries in our world suffering the effects of climate change were deeply moving. This was the spur-on we needed to commit to helping our global neighbours as they see only too well that their climate has already changed for the worse.

Whilst the cry of *Climate Justice Now!* was the main slogan whilst marching on City Hall, the cry is really against the injustice that the richer countries conduct upon the poorest. It was shocking to hear that the compensation in money to the worst affected as promised by those at the UN Paris agreement 2015 has yet to even begin. Also that much of the money that will be given, will be in the form of loans!

I would ask all at Knock Methodist, my church do our bit by physical demonstration when the call goes out (including group prayers), learning more and lobbying our politicians. I do know that many at Knock Methodist are fighting the good fight on their own Home Fronts but how will we answer the question: *What did you do in the Great Climate Crisis?* by our Maker and Creator? My Banner above states: *What did you do in the Great Climate Crisis Daddy?* Patricia's quotes part of Micah 6:8 *Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly.*

With kindest regards,

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