



Dear Friends of Eco-Congregation Ireland

Welcome to the Spring/Easter 2022 edition of the Eco-Congregation Ireland newsletter! The Eco-Congregation Ireland committee wishes everyone a peaceful and safe Eastertide! 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 Annual Review 2021 Available!

The Eco-Congregation Ireland Annual Review 2021 is now online – [read it here!](#) It includes ECI's highlights for 2021, including presentation of awards in 2021, online gatherings, the journey of our Climate Justice Candles and our involvement in the Climate Sunday initiative.



Two Retirements from the ECI Committee

Two church representatives on the ECI Committee have decided to step down in recent days. Joe Furphy, PCI rep, was one of the founding members of Eco-Congregation Ireland. A civil servant in the Department of the Environment, he has been working and volunteering in the conservation movement for over 60 years. He is an active member of the Ulster Wildlife Trust and several other nature organisations. He has worked very hard to promote creation care in the Presbyterian Church, and the fruits of his work have been shown in the congregations which have joined us and gone on to receive awards. Thank you Joe for all your hard work and enjoy your retirement!

Steven Johnston has also stepped down as Methodist representative on the committee. He joined us in 2016 and has worked hard to spread the word about ECI in Methodist congregations north and south. Again we wish to say a huge thank you to him and wish him well in the future.

Andrew Orr, Chairperson

PS new representatives will be nominated by their respective church bodies shortly.



ECI Climate Justice Candles are on the Move Again!!

Did you know that ECI has four Climate Justice Candles? One for each historic province of Ireland – Ulster, Munster, Connacht and Leinster! This means that we can get a candle to your church or parish when you need it. 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 ...

Togher Parish, Co Louth

The ECI Leinster Climate Justice Candle visited Togher Parish, Co Louth during the month of March. Monsignor James Carroll encouraged the global Christian family to awaken to the urgent need to heal our relationships with creation and with each other and to encourage our parish communities to do the same, for we know that things can change. Togher can play its part. He encouraged all to shine a light on the fair treatment of all people, and the need for projects that address climate change to care for the earth. Come Holy Spirit!



St Louis Schools' Network

On Tuesday, March 29th, the ECI Leinster Climate Justice Candle graced the Annual Conference of the St. Louis Schools' Network with its presence. In the wake of COP26 and the focus of world leaders on Climate Action and Climate Justice, the St. Louis Schools' Network concentrated on and developed this theme throughout the school communities during the current academic year. The St. Louis motto of *Sint Unum* finds expression in Global Citizenship Education which is an educational process aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live. Through their curricular and extra-curricular activities, students and teachers are shown how to become Global Citizens who take action to transform the world into a better place, a place that honours the dignity of every human person and the gift of all creation. On March 29th, almost 200 students and their teachers from the above schools met on Zoom for their Annual Network Day. [You can read a full report on this event on the ECI website here.](#)



St Michael's, Enniskillen

At the end of March the ECI Ulster Climate Justice Candle visited St Michael's, Enniskillen. Here are their photos >>



So, how was the Irish Churches Creation Care Conference?

Reports by Rev Trevor Sargent and Canon Andrew Orr

Rev Trevor Sargent

On Friday, April 8th, the Church of Ireland Church and Society Commission hosted a well-organized and fully booked conference called the Irish Churches on Creation Care, at Dromantine Conference Centre, near Newry, Co. Down. Rev. Canon Andrew Orr, one of the organizers, and Chairperson of Eco-Congregation Ireland, welcomed all those attending, citing two reasons for the Conference. Firstly, creation care is one timely way of following Christ's mission, 'through whom all things are made', (John 1:2). Secondly, the latest United Nations International Panel on Climate Change Report states that, while technically it is still possible to maintain global temperature rise to the 1.5 – 2 degree celsius safe limit for a liveable planet, that window of opportunity is closing fast. Attending the conference are, the Right Rev. George Davison, Bishop of Connor, the Right Rev. Andrew Forster, Bishop of Derry & Raphoe, Rev. Canon Andrew Orr, organizer, and the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, the Right Rev. John Mc Dowell.



What can Parishes do to Practically Care for Creation?

Dr Ruth Valerio, Director of Global Advocacy and Influencing at Tearfund, gave a workshop drawing on her wide experience of working with organisations such as Eco-Congregation internationally. Dr Valerio, who is also a Canon Theologian at Rochester Cathedral in England, observed that projects to care for creation can transform churches and communities in many good ways.

Examples:

- A church in Brighton uses some parish land for a vegetable garden.
- Gateway Church in Leeds, held a Climate Sunday Service, which led to an Eco-Team being formed to improve building efficiency, and land biodiversity, using the Tearfund Climate Emergency Toolkit.
- The Eternal Faith Church in India has set up a community garden.
- A church in the Mansioni District of Tanzania, which had no electricity supply, has set up a 'self-help group', to develop photovoltaic (PV) power generation, and a poultry enterprise.
- A church in Portadown has planted one acre of parish land with a mixture of sunflowers, linseed and flax, with the objective of providing food and habitat for birds, as well as generating income from sales of cut sunflowers. The profits will be used to install PV solar panels on the south facing church roof, to reduce heating and lighting costs in the future.

Four Church Leaders made Presentations

Rev. Dr. Sahr Yambasu, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, and Superintendent of St Patrick's Waterford Circuit, spoke about the hidden human costs of mining for resources which are needed for technologies which help us transition away from fossil fuels. He suggested that the Fair Trade certification, currently on some food



products, be extended to metals and other raw materials, so that workers in Africa, for example, could be guaranteed fair wages, good conditions, and proper rehabilitation of mined lands.

Rev. Dr David Bruce, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland spoke about listening well, and working in partnership with to the stakeholders in the work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, thinking especially of those working in food production.

Bishop Martin Hayes, Laudato Si' coordinating bishop for the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, spoke about training up 'animators' to work with local parishes (of any denomination) on projects to make parish life more sustainable.



Archbishop John McDowell, the Church of Ireland Primate of All Ireland admitted that the churches have been 'late to the party' when it comes to eco-action, but 'we are here now!' 'Our job', he stated, 'was ultimately to change the unsustainable culture we have, rather than tinkering with the rules'.

Young People Appeal for Less Talk and More Action

The conference heard from secondary school and college students from both Ireland and the United Kingdom. Tori Trower and Isabella Rowden-Kelly from All Saints' Parish, Mullingar, and Wilson's Hospital School, inspired all at the conference with their climate action project called, 'Lighten our Darkness by Numbers'. Separately, they also run biodiversity enhancing projects across twelve churchyards in County Westmeath, called, 'God's Gardens of Hope'. Hannah Malcolm, a Church of England ordinand, asked the question of each of us, 'How will our young people know that the Church loves them?' Rosalind Skillen, a young journalist who works with Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and the Belfast Telegraph, noted that, from the number of climate action demonstrations she has attended, it would be encouraging for her as a Christian, if more Christians turned up. Tori Trower and Isabella Rowden-Kelly from All Saints Church, Mullingar, were warmly applauded after their presentations.

The Irish Churches Creation Care Conference also featured case study from Shankill, Co. Dublin, presented by **Mr Justin Kilcullen**, who led the Irish development agency, Trócaire, for 20 years. Mr Kilcullen now works with various denominations under an umbrella organisation called S.A.G.E. (Shankill Action for a Green Earth). Actions by S.A.G.E:

- Hosted three election hustings for political candidates.
- Affiliated SAGE to the Stop Climate Chaos organisation.
- Engaged the Sustainable Energy Authority (SEAI) to carry out an energy audit on church buildings, and cost the improvements needed. Ceiling fans have now been installed in churches which retrieve the rising hot air in church and return it to where people are sitting!
- Devise eco-actions for Lent, under the headings, energy, care for the earth and biodiversity. Parishioners are invited to pick one eco-action and to undertake this during Lent.
- SAGE runs educational 'biodiversity walks'.
- Churches host the Eco-Congregation special Climate Candle.



Top right enjoying a chat are Rev. David White, Rector of the Carlow Union, and Mr Justin Kilcullen, of St Anne's Parish, Shankill, Co. Dublin.

Christian Aid Launched a Campaign to Help Victims of Climate Chaos

In advance of the next COP 27 meeting to be held in Egypt next November, Christian Aid, is calling for a realistic increase in financial support for poorer developing countries, and the creation of a new international fund for climate-related loss and damage. To find out more, email dublin@christian-aid.org or phone 01 4967040.

Canon Andrew Orr

The Irish Churches Creation Care Conference was held in the wonderful surroundings of Dromantine Retreat House, Newry. It was organised and sponsored by The Church of Ireland's Church and Society Commission but had



a diverse range of speakers from many different denominations. The day was booked out several weeks in advance with over 100 people taking part.

The day began with a recorded welcome from Prof Katharine Hayhoe, one of the world's leading climate scientists who works with the Us Nature Conservancy. The keynote speaker was Old Testament scholar Dr Chris Wright who took us on a deep dive into the Hebrew scriptures' texts, showing how care for creation is seen as honouring the creator, and that biodiversity demonstrates "the fullness of God". Workshops followed from Christian Aid's Bob Kikuyu and Tear Fund's Ruth Valerio reminding us that "Forget making poverty history: climate change will make poverty permanent".



After lunch, a panel of Church leaders: Archbishop John McDowell, Dr Sahr Yambasu, Dr. David Bruce and Bishop Martin Hayes spoke about what the churches should do next, with really positive messages of Commitment and urgency. However, They were upstaged by two teenagers from Meath and Kildare, Tori and Isabelle, who spoke of their plans and initiatives to improve biodiversity and fight climate change in their local area. Two more workshops followed on practical action from Justin Kilcullen, and from Hannah Malcolm on young people and climate justice. A final plenary quiz and closing remarks from Archbishop McDowell brought the day to a

close. With stands from Tear Fund, A Rocha, Christian Aid, Trocaire and the RSPB among others, there was plenty for participants to browse during the refreshments. And of course Eco Congregation was well represented in all the talks. All in all, it was a great day, with a mixture of theology, practical action and a wide range of voices. Huge thanks to all the organisers for their behind the scenes work!

Latest News ...

Knockbreda Belfast Community Garden Update

Ken Orr sent ECI this update: We have written before about this project, taking place in the grounds of Knockbreda Methodist Church, Rosetta, Belfast. We've made great progress over the winter, with a wood-working shed installed and a second polytunnel erected. A wildlife hedge has been planted along the entrance lane, and fruit bushes to form a border for the orchard area. All across the garden things are stirring, with the pond ready for its first full year of growth and the frogspawn already hatched to tadpoles. The potato beds are ready for planting soon, the plum trees are in full blossom and raspberry canes are just beginning to bud. The polytunnels are full of seedlings waiting for the last frosts to pass before we plant them out in the raised beds. All the work is carried out by enthusiastic volunteers from the local community, including representatives from all the local churches, and aided by a number of workers from the Community Service Division of the Probation Service. There's still lots to be done, but you can get a brief glimpse of the garden as it is now in this youtube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6QvltCkDQI>



We are planning an official Opening ceremony in June with some local celebrities in attendance, but in the meantime there will be a fund-raising plant sale on Saturday 23 April 10.00-12.00 with refreshments, activities for children, tours of the garden. The plants will be supplied by a local nursery, supplemented by some from our own polytunnel. More detail from Ken Orr at <mailto:lkorr@fastmail.fm>

The Call to Ecological Conversion at Bonnybrook

Margo Delaney sent ECI this latest update: The theme of this year's national tree week was "More Forests for a Greener Future." While we didn't manage to plant a forest, the planting of trees in the church and school grounds will surely contribute to "a greener future" in Bonnybrook.



This year again, **Our Acts of Love for Lent** challenge each of us to commit to concrete actions, however small, that protect our threatened earth. Week 1 highlighted things we can do to save energy; Week 2 focused on Food and how to prevent waste; Week 3 made us aware of the precious gift of water and how to avoid waste in our homes; Week 4, the focus is on the precious gift of water and how we can prevent waste in our homes. Next, we will focus on the use of plastics. Members of Care for the Earth ministry



Group have signed the pledge to end plastics. Below is an example of one act that could greatly lessen plastic pollution. Fr Joe reads out the Act of Love at the beginning of the liturgy each day and then places a laminated copy of it on our eco aware tree, while an A3 copy is placed on the church notice board.

Our weekly newsletter carries a quotation from Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, reminding us of the wonderful gift of creation and calling us to "protect our common home". In the light of the destruction of Ukraine and the immense suffering of the Ukrainian people, the gift of creation and the wonder of nature's rebirth touches us with God's healing presence and reminds us that "The Holy Ghost o'er the bent world broods/With warm breast and, ah! bright wings". (GM Hopkins)

Orlagh-in-the-City Laudato Si' Eco Group Latest News



Lorcan McDermott sent us this latest news: Orlagh-in-the-City community has recently returned to the St. Benildus Pastoral Centre in Kilmacud for Sunday Mass. This will give us the opportunity to host the climate justice candle and raise awareness of climate justice issues. Our Spring visit to An Tairseach Ecology Centre presents us with a challenge in terms of sustainable transport options from Dublin to Wicklow town. What combination of single occupancy cars, car sharing or public transport to use? The choice may be more difficult because of recently rising Covid levels. The book club has just begun reading John Feehan's *Every Bush Aflame: Science, God and the Natural World*. The book considers how advances in scientific enquiry, especially with reference to the natural environment, deepen our understanding of the relationship between science and religion. Lorcan sent us this beautiful photo on the right.

From Disappointment to Hope: Actions and Responses to Climate Breakdown – EcoQuakers Ireland Cork Gathering

An opportunity to reflect on where we are, hear from inspiring speakers, and identify positive ways forward. Lunch will be provided with vegetarian and vegan options. There is no charge for the event, but to help us with the arrangements, we ask that you let us know if you hope to come before Friday, 15th April by email to ecoquakers@quakers.ie.



When: Saturday 23 April 2022, 10.00am – 4.00pm

Venue: Cork Quaker Meeting House, Summerhill S, Ballintemple, Cork, T12 X\M8R

Speakers:

Brian O Suilleabhain is the convenor of EcoQuakers Ireland Committee. He is an actor, writer, and climate activist. Led by both science and faith, from an early age he has felt the call to prevent climate breakdown and biodiversity loss.

Canon Andrew Orr is Chair of Eco-Congregation Ireland, which encourages and supports churches of all denominations to incorporate the care of creation into their life and work. He worked for an environmental NGO before being ordained a Church of Ireland priest, and has served in parishes in the north and south. He is currently working in Youghal and Midleton.

For 24 years **Caroline Robinson** and her husband Eddie have been growing vegetables without chemicals on their 30 acre farm in Templemartin and selling their produce directly to customers at farmers' markets in Cork City and Macroom. She is passionate about the need for humans to reconnect with Mother Earth.

The Gathering is open to all who wish to come – please feel free to spread the word!

Mercy International Centre, Dublin – Upcoming Eco-Spirituality Retreats

All details on the flyers below. Contact Elizabeth MacNeal, Head of Heritage and Spirituality for more information - heritage@mercyinternational.ie. Explore - <https://www.mercyworld.org/>. Learn about all retreats - <https://tinyurl.com/yck2dc9m>.



SMA Summer School 2022 – Sufficiency, Not Growth: Towards a Safe and Sustainable Future

You are cordially invited to attend the SMA Summer School. The SMA Summer School provides high-quality, evidence-based knowledge and insight on matters of social and environmental justice within a faith context, with a view to supporting those committed to advocating for more just and sustainable policies in Ireland. Since 1984, the Society of African Missions (SMA) has hosted an annual Summer School. Originally established for SMA Fathers on holiday from mission, since then the Summer School has been opened to the wider public.



The focus for 2022 will be on the current ecocidal and socially destructive system of unconstrained growth, profit and consumption. We ask is there another way for us to live together on this planet, and to use its resources more justly, wisely and sustainably? The Summer School will take place on Saturday 18th and the morning of Sunday 19th of June 2022 via Zoom. We invite you to join us, and would be grateful if you would also pass this information on to others you think would be interested. This year's theme is: Sufficiency, Not Growth: Towards a Safe and Sustainable Future.

Speakers: Prof John Barry (QUB), Dr Seán Healy SMA (Social Justice Ireland), Dr Anne Ryan (MU), Prof Sathbh O'Neill (DCU), Dr Tom McDonnell (NERI), Sr Colette Kane OP (An Tairseach – Organic Farm and Ecology Centre) and Rachel Power (The Climate Reality Project). Chaired by Colette Bennett (Social Justice

Ireland). To view full programme [CLICK HERE](#). To Book a place go to www.sma.ie and click on the Summer School 2022 icon on the top of the homepage.



SMA Summer School 2022

In collaboration with
The Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles



Sufficiency, Not Growth: Towards a Safe and Sustainable Future

The current system of constant growth, profit and consumption is ecocidal and socially destructive. Is there another way for us to live together on this planet, and to use its resources more justly, wisely and sustainably?

[Online Event](#)

Date: Saturday 18th and Sunday morning 19th June 2022

Speakers

Prof John Barry (QUB), Dr Anne B Ryan (MU), Dr Seán Healy SMA (Social Justice Ireland), Prof Sadhbh O'Neill (DCU), Sr Colette Kane OP (An Tairseach), Dr Tom McDonnell (NERI), with Colette Bennett (Social Justice Ireland) as Chair.

[Book via www.sma.ie](http://www.sma.ie)

SMA Justice Office Email: justice@sma.ie



Westport Eco-Congregation Keeps Busy!

Caroline Goucher sent ECI this update: Westport Eco-Congregation has had a few busy months. We have been discussing the Pastoral Letter from Dublin Diocese "Cry of the Earth – Cry of the Poor". We have found the letter challenging, encouraging and hopeful. We continue to support other environmental groups in our town and have been involved in beach clean ups and cycling events this

Spring. Our group was delighted to participate in Westport's St Patrick's Day parade this year. The theme of the parade was Climate Change – we joined forces with Westport Tidy Towns and 15 Minute Westport (cycling group). We carried our banner – Caring for our Common Home.

On March 26th we were delighted to once again celebrate Earth Hour in Westport. We held a ceremony at the Octagon at 8.30. We were joined by local musicians and singers. We raised awareness on the issue of Climate Change with the public. We advertised the event on social media – Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and encouraged people to turn off lights at home if unable to attend our event. We are continuing our campaign to eradicate single use plastic bottles from our town. We have posters in all sports clubs and a large banner has been displayed in our Town Hall Theatre highlighting the issue of single use plastic bottles. This will continue to be our lead project for the year ahead.

Creation Spirituality Retreat at Drumalis – Dying to Live

This creation spirituality retreat at Drumalis from 24-28 July, will be led by Srs Margaret Rose McSparran, Anne Harnett, Nellie McLaughlin and Coirle McCarthy. All information and registration details are on [the retreat flyer here](#).



Latest News from Cloughjordan Eco-Congregation

In early March 2022 as part of Lenten Celebrations, Rev. Steven Foster from the Methodist Church in Cloughjordan, passed on the Cloughjordan Mosaic to Archdeacon Terry Mitchell of the Church of Ireland, before the Sunday Service. The Tree of Life mosaic was presented to the Cloughjordan Eco-Congregation in the Summer 2019 on the visit to the village by the Jordanian Ambassador to the UK and Ireland, HE Omar BAL-Nahar.

The mosaic, from an important early Christian church site in Jordan, serves to mark historic links between Cloughjordan and the Kingdom of Jordan. The mosaic was initially displayed in St Michael & St John's Catholic Church and then passed on to the Methodist Church at the start of March 2020 by Fr Pat Greed. The mosaic will be on display in St Kieran's Church of Ireland over the coming months.



News from Shankill, Co Dublin

Kathie Davey from St Anne's, Shankill sent ECI this update: parishioners gave out eco tips for Lenten activity, mostly based on energy saving. Parishioners were invited to tell us, by Palm Sunday, how they kept their resolutions. The photo on the right was taken outside St Anne's Church with Geraldine Murphy and her husband, from neighbouring Johnstown Parish, who came to find out how we had organised our biodiversity border as they plan one for their church grounds. You can see the end of the border on the right of the picture. We are now just waiting for some topsoil from DLRCOCO to plant a wildflower border alongside the parish resource centre. This will be in full view of a bus stop!



Welcome Holy Trinity Parish, Killiney!

Joan Millar Eco-Congregation Co-ordinator sent ECI this news: Holy Trinity Parish Killiney has started their journey with Eco-Congregation Ireland, having been encouraged by Whitechurch Parish Rathfarnham. We have sent in our application for the Awareness Certificate and have plans to get to the next stage with our happy enthusiastic gardeners group, headed up by Professor Caroline Elliot Kingston. We have listened and applied ourselves to the four areas of the project with our Rector, the Reverend Gary Hastings giving us much encouragement. We invited Whitechurch Parish to visit us on the 2nd April to show them our grounds and will pick their brains for valuable help. We hope to have a lot more to report as things develop! Welcome to all!



Focolare Tree-Planting in Co Offaly

Barry Redmond & Mariella Spiteri from Focolare sent this report: We would like to share with you and all our friends of Eco-Congregation Ireland our latest experience: a Tree-Planting Activity in Co. Offaly which took place on the 12th of March 2022. Our friends, the von Ow family from Geashill, Co. Offaly had a brilliant idea to involve other families in a tree planting activity as they had a good number of broadleaf trees

ready to find an ideal home for them. A neighbour of theirs, Christopher Fettes, passionate about ecology, was happy to offer his land on which he had already planted more than 12,000 trees. Another neighbour,

Senator Pippa Hackett, Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, was equally happy to be there to say a few words of encouragement for this special occasion.

On that day, we were quite a number scattered on the Bloomville land: children, young and old, local neighbours but also others coming together some for the first time from Co. Dublin, Co. Wexford, Co. Wicklow and Co. Kildare, a mosaic of families armed with spades, wellies, and a lot of contagious enthusiasm. We were about sixty people and we planted fifty trees amid squeals of laughter and pure joy to be out in the open air, dirtying our hands and feeling good to do something worthwhile for our planet.

Children's faces lit up with joy when everyone received a personal certificate as a keepsake of this day. This too, served as an incentive to visit again this place and encourage everyone to be responsible stewards in future by caring for each tree planted. Indeed, our team had put in a lot of time, effort, and expertise in choosing the right tree, the right place to dig the holes and the right time to do the actual planting. A fun thing was to include, after the tree planting activity had been completed, a six-stage educational trail to discover together the beauty of nature surrounding Bloomville house. At each location a parent gave a brief talk on what the children were looking at.

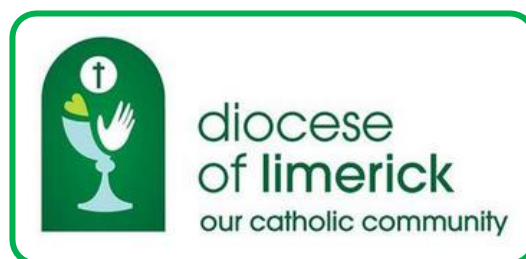


The first was the stream of pure water that comes from a nearby spring where the children had the joy of cupping their hands to drink directly from the spring while parents looked on. Then we went to the place where willow rods for basket making grow. Children had fun seeking the right sized willow rod to use as their walking stick or to poke at things which greatly attracted their attention like heaps of dry leaves.

The native oak woodland gave parents a challenge as a father was invited to fell a small tree with an axe to see how resistant they are and why our Irish ancestors used oak trees to build their homes. The badger sett intrigued the children as did the bat boxes high up on the trees where bats roost during the day. Many a willow rod went up to touch the wooden boxes opened by a slot underneath to allow bats to enter and take refuge. Children were enthralled by all these novelties! It was a truly fabulous educational trail, packed with fun activities for young and old. We simply could not resist a group photo at a magnificent two hundred and fifty-year-old Spanish Chestnut as a reminder of this day. Before we said our goodbyes, our team gave each family a gift of free trees to take home for their own gardens. Then just as we got into our cars, the heavens opened! It seemed as if everything had been planned perfectly for us giving us just enough time to finish in glory. We look forward to revisit soon with the same families, for yet another picnic, to continue with our stewardship programme on the progress of our trees.

Diocese of Limerick Latest News

Rose O'Connor sent ECI this latest news: The members of the Inter Diocesan Laudato Si' Network met on Thursday 22nd January to share ideas for the upcoming Season of Lent. In Limerick, inspired by the words of Wendall Berry "And the world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles, no matter how long, but only by a spiritual journey – a journey of one inch, by which we arrive at the ground at our feet, and learn to be at home", we invited Dr Niamh Brennan to guide us through three nights entitled "Finding my Path in the Universe". Many joined us via zoom. It was a very thought-provoking series, inspiring us to take up our own personal and deep spiritual journey.



Aoife Walsh, the Diocese's Youth Ministry Coordinator prepared a "Resource Pack for Schools" entitled "Catholic Social Justice". Accompanying these were "Social Justice Prayers/Poems/Reflections". These resources are adaptable for any setting, the pack is available here: [Social Justice Classroom Pack Complete \(limerickdiocese.org\)](https://limerickdiocese.org/SocialJusticeClassroomPackComplete).

A series of "Enviro-Lenten" films were offered for three Saturday nights in March, they were hosted in the Diocesan Centre, Corbally. The group who participated found it a very enlightening and challenging experience. On these nights we shared hospitality and enjoyed the company and the sharing. Hopefully we will grow the experience. If others are interested, you can view trailers for the three films here:

'The Human Element': <https://youtu.be/k34FhplukXQ>

'My Octopus Teacher': <https://youtu.be/3s0LTDhqe5A>

'Living the Change': https://youtu.be/x3d3rl6id_c

A "Live, Love, Lent" campaign is currently being hosted via the Limerick Diocese Facebook page. A topic is introduced each Sunday followed by a post each day of the week. The following Sunday evening there is a shared conversation on Facebook Live about the impact of the previous week. The week beginning April 4th is dedicated to the theme of the Environment and this will be followed by daily reflections and a shared conversation on Sunday 10th at 8.30pm. An introductory video by Sr Betty Baker on the Environment theme can be viewed here: <https://fb.watch/c9E21A1o8Y/> The daily posts will be published each morning at 7am and are available on the Limerick Diocese Facebook page, you do not need to sign up to Facebook to be able to view them: <https://www.facebook.com/dioceseflimerick>



ACRE – First Pocket Forest in Northern Ireland

Active Communities Restoring the Earth is involved in creating the first Pocket Forest in Northern Ireland, planted in Newry on 3 February 2022. The project was a partnership between [ACRE](#) and [Barcroft Community Gardens](#), Newry. Acre was set up by Jesuits in Northern Ireland in 2020.

[What's a Pocket Forest?](#)

Pocket Forests are tiny biodiverse islands, usually located in urban areas, which replicate as closely as possible a naturally wooded area. Pocket forests are planted in small areas, ranging from the size of a car park space up to the size of a basketball court. Soil preparation, including adding lots of organic material to the soil, feeding the worms and microorganisms which are essential for healthy soil, is the first step in creating these forests. A wide range of native trees and shrubs are densely planted together encouraging fast growth which quickly bear fruits, attracting birds, butterflies, bees and insects. Pocket Forests offer an incredible opportunity to enhance the biodiversity in the local area as well as capture and store carbon.

Education: Barcroft Gardens have partnered with Barcroft Primary School. Their 35 children who attended enthusiastically planted 300 trees, whilst learn about Pocket Forests. The site will be used for on-going education with local schools and the wider community.

Local Communities: ACRE played a key role at the beginning of the project bringing the different parts together. But the project is wholly owned by Barcroft Community Gardens: they are the local community at the centre of everything. The project could not have succeeded without the technical know-how of [PocketForests.ie](#). They are the group who have played a huge part in getting Pocket Forests planted all over the ROI.

Funders: As well as the Jesuits in Ireland, who gave seed funding to ACRE, this project has been generously funded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Their grant was the largest they have given for this kind of project. Newry, Mourne and Down District Council also contributed.

Blessington Gets Planting!

Carmel O'Neill sent ECI this latest report: During the month of February, the parish focussed on the theme of energy saving and ways to reduce energy costs in the current climate of rising costs. We published a number of tips in the parish newsletter.

The children from Blessington No 1 NS have been reflecting on the theme of God's Creation and Care of the Earth as part of their preparation for 1st Holy Communion. Each child wrote their promise on how they can live more sustainably. Their pledges are on display in the porch of the church of Our Lady Blessington.



Lacken Tidy Village group gave out hundreds of sapling trees to each family in the community on the weekend of Feb 19th/20th. The trees included Rowan, Whitethorn, Blackthorn, Spindler and Alder. Members of the Tidy Village Group and Eco-Congregation volunteered with the project. There was a wonderful and appreciative response to this initiative with many people wanting to learn more about their tree and planting conditions.



To mark National Tree Week, we planted a native Irish Cherry in the grounds of Lacken church On March 25th. The children from 2nd/3rd class of Lacken NS took part in the ceremony. Fr Richard blessed the tree and thanked God for the life giving nature of trees. Carmel O'Neill read Psalm 104. Prior to the planting ceremony, we planted 22 metres of Whitethorn hedging along the boundary wall of Lacken church. The blossom will provide a source of food for the bees in spring and berries for the birds in winter.

Members of Lacken Eco-Congregation participated in an online talk on Hedgerows by Anja Murray. This talk organised by West Wicklow Environmental Network was very informative and complimented much of the work we have been doing in recent weeks in the community. [Visit the ECI website to view all of their photos.](#)

Eco Challenge!

Monthly Eco Hints from St George's Parish Church, Belfast

Parishioners in St George's Parish, Belfast published information on how to protect the bees in their last magazine and are hoping to have a similar hint for the environment each month. They also had a short piece about trying to use less heating in the home.

Hint: Help bumblebees

You might notice large bumblebees in your garden this month. These are newly emerged queens, and they will often spend time crawling around the ground searching for somewhere to start their nest this year. There are some things you can do to help:

1. Be untidy! Try not to view your garden as another room in your house. It doesn't have to be a wilderness, but avoid the temptation to make it too "tidy". Leave a couple of areas undisturbed: areas of uncut grass are particularly useful, as bumblebees can create nests in these grassy tussocks.

2. Lose the word "weed": change how you view "weeds". These are mainly pioneering wildflowers that are utilising your garden as a habitat, and many of them can benefit wildlife. Dandelions and clover in particular



are important sources of pollen and nectar for pollinating insects, especially bumblebees. Try to resist the urge to cut them as soon as they appear- allow them to flower for a few weeks.

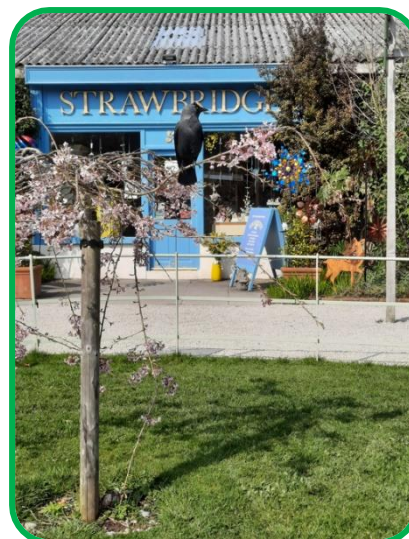
3. Ditch the sprays: avoid the use of chemicals. Insecticides and herbicides might reduce “pests”, but they can be very damaging to wildlife, and generally aren’t necessary in a garden environment. You will find more bees and butterflies without the use of chemicals, and yes you might have less perfect plants, but think about why you are gardening in the first place? If you want to improve your environment, and help nature, then think of your garden as a mini ecosystem. [Learn more from Dr Una Fitzpatrick here.](#)

Prayers/Reflections for the Earth

A Reflection by Fr Hugh O’Donnell – Blossom

Is there anything as precious as blossom? Its arrival in spring catches the deep feeling that words don’t reach. The great happening that occurs with the cherry, for example, is beloved especially of the Japanese who even arrange to have picnics under its flowering branches. So, we have Basho’s tender haiku in which he catches the humour and wonder of people finding wind-blown blossom in their soup and salad.

In his poem ‘From Blossoms’, Li- Young Lee imagines how in eating a peach one is also eating the blossom and the shade, the fellowship and the orchard. On such days of awareness, death, he suggests, seems to lose its foothold and there is only joy and the movement ‘from blossom to blossom to/impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom’. You can almost hear in its repetition how delightfully the word appeals to him, how it hesitates before the ecstasy it can’t contain.



‘Blossom’ is our word for attempting to name the unnameable, a tree in flower, the divine mystery revealing itself in earth’s unfolding. And we are part of it all.

The ancient ritual of bowing to another still has resonance in eastern cultures. At its core is the recognition that what is divine in me recognises the divine in you. It is one of our most fragrant gestures. When applied to the natural world, our bowing addresses the inner life of the tree – ‘You are beautiful’- and is reciprocated.

Be Not High Minded – A Reflection by Rev Andrew Kingston



The seal of the Chapter of the Cathedral Church of St Patrick, Dublin proved an interesting hare to pursue on Google one day. There are copies of it on ancient gates at the Cathedral. They caught my eye on the way in for the service on St Patrick’s Day.

The first source, the Dublin Penny Journal of 1833, suggested that the tree “appears to be the barren fig tree”. That seemed unlikely, but perhaps it was a warning to all Churches that have ceased to bare good fruit? The scroll surrounding the head of the figure reads *Noli Altum Sapere*, “*Be not high minded*”, and was equally puzzling. Should we not have our minds on higher things as we go to worship?

Thankfully another site had more reliable information. The device is an olive tree and the seal dates from 1574 and also includes the badges of the House of Tudor - the rose and the portcullis, and the royal arms of both France and England on the quarters of the shield. *Noli Altum Sapere* is a quotation from St Paul and he is the figure unfurling the scroll. A modern translation of Romans 11:20 makes more sense to us today. Paul urges the Gentile Church in Rome “*Do not be arrogant*”. The particular

context was a plea to Gentile Christians to cherish their brothers and sisters who came from a Jewish background and who still practiced their Judaism alongside their Christian faith.

A closer look at the seal shows branches that have been broken off. A larger excerpt expands Paul argument. *"If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.' Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble.* Romans 11:17-20.

This is a warning not to take our connection to God through faith in Christ for granted. Gentiles are like a wild olive grafted into the ancient Jewish rootstock.

We are not alone in learning valuable lessons from trees. If we arrogantly mistreat nature, it will come back to bite us. *"Be not high minded"* teaches us to be humble towards nature, towards each other, and before God.

With kindest regards,

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