

Many churches in our diocese are working towards Eco Church awards in very different ways. Here are just a few examples to inspire you.

1 Worship

As the vicar of St Thomas' in Wells, the Revd Tobie Osmond, prepared a collection of multi-media worship materials for services in Creationtide in 2018. "We had a desire to explore how we as Christians were engaging with nature. We held four services during Creationtide, with videos playing at the beginning and end of each of the services, featuring moving art, some Psalms and blessings, all relating to nature."

The culmination of the series of services was an outdoor service at Beech Barrow just outside Wells. Tobie says, "It was a very cold and blowy October, so although we couldn't light any of the lanterns we took with us, we were blessed with clear, bright, starry skies. It was great to be there, in nature, worshipping God through His creation, through what we saw around us. It was incredibly powerful, so much so that the congregation wanted to do it again and did do it again, with an outdoor worship in Creationtide last year, in the poustinia in the gardens at the Bishop's Palace."

Jonathan Jelfs, lay worship assistant at St Thomas', helped prepare and offer the 'Sacred Earth Series'. He says, "The poustinia is a special place for seeking God and our theme for that service was 'Finding God in Sacred Earth'. The series incorporated contemporary worship, sacred chant, poetry, music and video material as we explored the 'Sacred Earth' theme. We concluded with a 'community conversation' and suggestions of how to respond to the issues and 'Be the Change Together' as a local church."

Next steps



Tobie Osmond's worship materials are available to download from the 'Environment' section of the website. Contact Tobie if you'd like to find out more. vicar@stmarymagdalenetaunton.org.uk



St Thomas' held its second outdoor worship at the Poustinia in the Bishop's Palace, Wells.

2 Buildings

The Revd Ken Madden is supporting Bath Abbey in its efforts to live and tell the good news of Jesus to the city of Bath and its visitors. One of the marks of mission it has recently been focusing on is 'sustaining and renewing creation' and the Abbey has already taken a big step forward in improving its environmental credentials by sourcing the water powering its heating system from the nearby Roman Baths.

Ken says, "The Footprint project started because the floor was sinking, not to sort out the heating, but the Abbey reflected on what else could be done while the floor was up and installing underfloor heating, fuelled by the hot water from the Baths, was an opportunity not to be missed. Not all churches can benefit from a natural hot water source, but when any church has building work done they can consider what opportunities that offers."

With green heating in place, Ken is now focused on the smaller step the Abbey can make to be more eco-friendly, such as recycling and reducing plastic. His rationale for volunteering to help Bath Abbey with Eco Church is simple, he says, "We are called to be good stewards of creation. It is not an add-on to our Christian calling, it is integral to it."

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Land

With a background in environmental conservation and as a churchwarden at a church with some under-used glebe land, working on the land aspect of Eco Church criteria was natural for Julian Brooks, St Michael and All Angels in Haselbury Plucknett.

After his church filled out the Eco Church questionnaire and just fell short of a bronze award, he started looking at what practical steps they could make as a church to lessen their impact on the environment. Julian explains, "Around this time, there was a village initiative to enter the Royal Horticultural Society's (RHS) 'In Bloom' competition, which stimulated further activity and discussions around land biodiversity, community and the environment. These are all assessed for the competition, it's not just about hanging baskets anymore."

He adds, "It all became very clear that the church was in a position to do something with its glebe land. Half of our land is rented out to a community orchard but there was also a field which was doing absolutely nothing. We introduced nine of the 50 village bird boxes into the field and churchyard and I built some bug hotels using leftover material from church restorations, which were placed in prominent locations around the village. We also created a wildlife area in our churchyard which proved very striking when poppies appeared alongside our war memorial."

The village ended up winning a gold award for In Bloom and an Exceptional Community Engagement award, while the church is well on the way to getting its bronze Eco Church accreditation.



Poppies were the first flowers to appear in the wildflower area at St Michael and All Angels.

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Community

The Revd Dr Rich Tweedy, Vicar at Polden Wheel benefice, and his PCC have just started to explore Eco Church. He says, "We don't know how easy it is going to be. We've got six old churches, comparatively small congregations and limited finances, but we are beginning to navigate the pathway." They were inspired to explore Eco Church after a successful community event focused on wildlife. Rich explains, "I am a keen birdwatcher, so with three nature reserves within 10 minutes of my doorstep I had an itch to connect the world of wildlife with the world of the church." The inspiration came from a chance conversation in a bird hide, following the benefice's successful Flower Festival, which led to the development of the 'Eyes on Wildlife' weekend.

The Eyes on Wildlife weekend offered something for everyone.



A wildlife photography exhibition ran throughout the weekend, with contributions from some of the best wildlife photographers in Somerset. There was a supper and talk from renowned wildlife writer Dominic Couzens, who's also a Christian; for families there was a Muddy Church and on the Sunday there were talks from the diocesan Eco team on the importance of engaging with care for creation.

Rich says, "We attracted a wide audience from the parish who had an interest in wildlife, as well as the wider wildlife photography community who were not necessarily churchgoers."

The event has inspired other churches in the area to host similar events and Rich hopes to hold something similar next year.

Next steps



Read more about the Eyes on Wildlife weekend at bathandwells.org.uk/wildlife-weekend

"While not every church will be able to meet all the criteria, it is important for us all to find ways to tread more lightly on the Earth."

Next steps



What's happening in Bath and Wells

The Diocese of Bath and Wells has registered its commitment to become an Eco Diocese, and will be launching its environmental policy later this year.

The Right Revd Ruth Worsley, Bishop of Taunton, says, "I would encourage all our churches to take time to think about how they can care for creation and to explore Eco Church which offers a very clear pathway to help your church care for creation. While not every church will be able to meet all the criteria, it is important for us all to find ways to tread more lightly on the Earth."

Find out more about Eco Church and how you can register at <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk>

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Lifestyle

Sara Jeffery's interest in environmental matters started at a young age; she won a couple of national awards for caring for wildlife and animals before progressing to studying a degree in Coastal Management. She is now studying for a Masters in Green Economy but her personal passion for creation has also led her to help others take steps to minimise their environmental impact. She also organised an environmental fair at her church, Holy Trinity, Yeovil, last year.

Sara says, "I love research, but also really want to do what I do with EcoFair which is get as many people involved as possible and make changes we need to make as soon as possible as a community. Individual change is wonderful but it is so much more empowering to do it as a group."

Sara was prompted to hold the fair as she realised there was little choice and



Bishop Peter joined Sara Jeffrey (left) at the Eco Fair at Holy Trinity, Yeovil.

support for people in Yeovil who wanted to make green lifestyle changes – not just to purchase environmentally-friendly products, but to get advice.

She says, "There was no central point to share what is going on in our area. As a Christian concerned with stewarding God's kingdom, and with Holy Trinity being the wonderful size it is, it seemed the ideal place to hold a fair. It started as a small event, with a few speakers, but it grew quite quickly into a day of workshops and more. People who came felt they were taking home their personal contributions, but they were also part of a community coming together."

Next steps



The next Eco Fair will take place at Holy Trinity, Yeovil on Saturday, 30 May. Look out for more details on the diocesan website.