



Caritas Plymouth Environment Case Study

CREATING GREEN SPACES IN OUR PARISHES

Since 2015, an unused and derelict space left following the demolition of the parish hall at the church of Our Lady and St Patrick, Teignmouth, has been transformed into a series of gardens designed to recycle as much as possible, attract wildlife and grow food and herbs. The land was not suitable for rebuilding due to subsidence and the soil was of poor quality.

The space was overgrown with buddleia and willows and full of stones, rocks and breezeblocks. This has gradually been cleared with new garden spaces created each year.

As much as possible has been recycled: any wood cut down has been used to make a huge woodpile which is now a home for hedgehogs and nesting wrens and dunnocks; the willows have been pollarded to create fences; the stones from the demolition have been used to make paths and raised beds; stone flags from an old toilet have been used to create a seated area.

The new garden has been created with biodiversity in mind and includes a wild area; a pond which now attracts dragonflies, newts and frogs; bat boxes; a rose walk; an orchard which now has 7 fruit trees; a wildflower meadow; a herb garden and a vegetable garden. Parishioners have donated plants and the parish has shared plants at events.

The project has been low cost (most of the work has been carried out by Fr Mark) and incremental, with new areas being cleared each year and new planting also using plants and seeds shared by parishioners and friends.

The garden raises awareness of environmental issues both among those who visit but also through schemes such as plant swapping, sharing cuttings and seeds - effectively creating a shared library of plants and seeds. Gardening encourages people to think about the environment

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There have been some real benefits from this project:

- ◇ There has been a significant increase in biodiversity and wildlife in this space. There are now foxes, badgers, hedgehogs, a variety of birds, bees and butterflies and a huge range of different plants and trees. The pond attracts dragonflies and frogs.
- ◇ The garden has taken every opportunity to reuse and recycle - cupboards and table-tops have been used as raised beds. Stones have been used to create paths.

But there were also some challenges

- ◇ Creation of a new garden from scratch is time consuming and relies on having people who love what they do and want to spend time on it. Not everyone in a parish will be interested in gardening or wildlife.
- ◇ There are costs. The land was very poor so it was necessary to purchase compost until the garden could produce its own.
- ◇ It can be daunting to take on such a big project and it takes time to get results. It is important to do things that will show a quick result (such as the wildflower meadow) to keep up enthusiasm

This project shows that relatively unfertile land and unpromising spaces can be reclaimed and used to create areas of beauty and reflection which benefit the environment as well as people's mental health. Even making small changes (such as sowing wildflowers) can have a rapid impact.

'We come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast.'

Laudato Si' #244

