Environment Policy Annual Review

2022

“Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.”

-Pope Francis

Caritas Plymouth • Diocese of Plymouth • St Boniface House • Ashburton • Devon • TQ13 7JL

Schlerder Abbey Environment Event

Introduction

This is the second annual review of the Diocese of Plymouth Environmental Policy which was agreed by Trustees in January 2021. This report gives a brief overview of progress being made to implement the commitments in the policy. We have continued to increase opportunities for prayer and reflection on Catholic Social Teaching and our responsibility to care for our Common Home and made significant progress in measuring our carbon footprint to enable us to set a baseline on which we can build a strategy for improvement. We have seen increased engagement by parishes taking part in the Season of Creation and by schools, and other groups in taking action to care for our Common Home.

Reflection by Canon John Deeny, Chair of the Environment Committee

The two great commandments of Jesus are to love God and love your neighbour as yourself. We have only one heart, and the heart that loves God and neighbour, will also love the natural world around us which God created. Our recently deceased Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, in speaking to Italian students in 2011: "*Respect for the human being and respect for nature are one, but both can grow and find their right measure if we respect in the human being, and in nature, the Creator and his creation. On this, dear young people, I believe to find allies in you, true "guardians of life and creation."*

We are, guardians of life and creation and, indeed, intimately connected to the natural world around us. In *The Canticle of the Sun* of St Francis of Assisi sings of the familial relationship we share with nature: brother sun, sister moon, brother wind and sister water. The ancient prayers we offer over the bread and wine at Mass, beautifully express how God, the Earth, and human beings work in harmony to produce something which is good, which will go on to become for us the Body and Blood of Christ. The bread and wine are symbols of how we can work together, in collaboration, for the common good. There is much to be done.

The enormity of the environmental challenges that face us can seem daunting. The summer of 2022 was another record year for rising temperatures across Europe. It is not just climate change, of course. The problems facing us are many, varied and inter-related, as are the variety of responses that are required from us. But essentially, we need a heart shaped by our discipleship of Jesus. One that loves God, neighbour, and the natural world around us. The bishops of England and Wales, in their document (updated in 2022) *The Call of Creation,* call us 'to a profound interior conversion, whereby the effects of our relationship with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us.'

It is wonderful to see the variety of initiatives and efforts being made in our parishes and schools, and in the wider community, to respond to the call for change and bring healing and flourishing to God's creation. As Christians we walk in hope and believe in redemption. We can all do something as a Church, and as individuals, to make a difference in bringing harmony and repair to our relationship with God's creation. May the work that has already been taking place in our own diocese, reflected in this Review, be a help and inspiration for us all in being guardians of life and creation.

The following is a summary of actions taken in 2022 to take forward each of our twelve commitments:

(i) To pray, study the scriptures, reflect on Catholic tradition, and educate ourselves about the interconnectedness of all aspects of our common home in order to develop a spirituality which seeks to understand the effects of our actions on the poorest and most vulnerable people in our world as well as the earth's fragile ecology and the need for economies and lifestyles which reflect God's creation.

We were successful in obtaining funding from the Big Lottery for a series of events during Laudato Si' week (May) and the Season of Creation (September). During this period we :

- ◊ Delivered four face-to-face events reaching 165 people
- ◊ Held three online events reaching over 2,000 people
- ◊ Presented at four regional school conferences reaching 45 people
- ◊ Distributed 1500 pledge cards and other materials to all 67 parish communities and 34 schools in the Diocese. 11 parish communities held events and 31 parishes shared our materials reaching an estimated 3800 people.
- ◊ Tested an online pledge campaign including advertising through Catholic SouthWest.
- ◊ Received 250 pledges to action (50% of our target).

(ii) To advocate for and work with people on the margins and people living in poverty since "a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; [integrating] questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (Pope Francis Laudato Si' #49)

All the events we delivered had an element of advocacy. We cannot address climate change without addressing global and domestic inequality. In November 2022, we held an event at St Mary's in Poole to reflect on Pope Francis's message for World Day of the Poor. A key element of this event was a focus on integral ecology and the interconnectedness of climate change and poverty and how we are called to take action. The results from this event were shared online through our website. We work closely with CAFOD and promote their global justice campaigns.

(iii) To ensure the mission of the church locally and on a diocesan level includes proclamation on environmental concerns in line with the living out of the gospel in people's lives, and exercising the prophetic voice of the church in support of stewardship and appropriate environmental action, such that the views of the church are heard and widely understood. (Pope Benedict Caritas in Veritate #51)

We circulated materials to all 67 parish communities to encourage them to hold events to reflect on climate change. Eleven parish communities held events and others shared season of creation resources to enable people to pledge to care for the environment. We estimate that this enabled us to reach over 3800 people.

Caritas Plymouth hosted a staff event and presented at four regional school conferences which were held across the diocese to talk about Catholic Social teaching and the environment. We shared a display in the foyer of our main offices created by a work experience student which invited visitors to make pledges. The display was seen by all visitors who came to the diocesan offices between July - September 2022.

"Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."
(Laudato Si' #. 50)

(iv) To ensure that our buildings are managed with care for the environment and have action plans to reduce negative impacts

We work closely with the diocesan property team who ensure that all major decisions about building refurbishment consider the environmental impacts. Our property team proactively looks at environmentally friendly options for property management. Examples include:

- ◊ Using recycled furniture from across the diocese for Edmund Rice building
- ◊ Supporting parishes to purchase heating equipment that conforms to the highest environmental standards
- ◊ Supporting installation of solar panels and other options for parish buildings
- ◊ Installing underfloor and other insulation in presbyteries
- ◊ Exploring wind power and electric car charging options for St Boniface House

Our diocesan grants officer, Zoe Oldman, proactively supports teams and parishes to find external grant funding for environmental projects. In 2022 we had 5 successful bids amounting to £37,854:

£15,000 Albert Gubay Foundation Improvements to Saltash Parish Hall to include planting a wildflower meadow and community garden.
£4,674 National Garden Scheme Community Gardens Award for a community garden at Penzance
£2,650 NGS Community Gardens Award for the creation of a community garden in Axminster
£5,900 National Lottery Community Fund Climate Action initiative events in Launceston parish
£9,630 National Lottery Community Fund Climate Action initiative – Caritas (pledges)

She also submitted other bids for over £170,000 which were unsuccessful including environmental audits, outreach work, solar panels, a youth environmental group and a community garden. These applications highlight the breadth of reflection in our parishes about care for creation and the interest in our environmental work as part of our Missionary work.

'Praise to you, my Lord, through sister Mother Earth, who sustains us and governs us and who produces varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.'
St Francis of Assisi (from Canticle of the Sun)

The Diocese of Plymouth is powered by fully renewable energy through the Inter-diocesan Fuel Management (IFM) agreement with British Gas

v) To minimise our use of the earth's natural resources, reducing our carbon footprint, minimising waste generation, and re-using and recycling when possible.

We have set up a Live Simply team at the diocesan Curia offices at St Boniface House who are working towards an award. New systems have been introduced to purchase fair trade and environmentally friendly products, to promote recycling and reduce waste through composting and other approaches. We promote re-using and recycling by parishes. A snapshot survey in December 2022 suggests that around 70% of parishes recycle. We have commissioned a consultant to calculate our carbon footprint.

(vi) To follow ethical purchasing practices and influence our suppliers and contractors to ensure that goods and services procured support the environmental policy, and, in turn, that all suppliers and contractors progressively improve their own environmental performance

We have contacted our contractors and suppliers to ask for their environmental commitments and to match our commitment to paying the real Living Wage. We encourage parishes to consider purchasing fair trade and reducing use of single plastic items.

Pupils of St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Buckfast receiving their Caritas In Action Award from Canon John Deeny and Deborah Fisher

Mini Vinnies at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Poole

(vii) To enhance the biodiversity of all Diocesan-owned grounds and gardens and our schools.

We continue to showcase good practice, such as funding for a new community garden in Penzance. A small survey suggests that 50% of parishes have a wildlife garden and this will be tested through a wider survey in 2023.

(viii) To encourage ecological education in our schools and parishes

We have given out six Laudato' Si' Awards to schools in 2022 in recognition of their environmental work. In April, we launched a competition to invite school pupils to send in original artwork that we could use for our prayer cards for Season of Creation. The winner was from St Boniface college in Plymouth. St Mary's Primary, Buckfast shared creation artwork which was displayed in our Curia offices. Over 2000 pupils attended an online liturgy for Season of Creation led by Canon Mark O'Keefe.

ix) To ensure that our investment policies adhere to ethical guidelines and promote investment for social benefit.

We reviewed our investment policy earlier in 2022 and have recommended it is updated to have a greater emphasis on environmental issues.

(x) To access all our activities and operations in order to identify, understand and evaluate all the direct and indirect environmental aspects and prioritise action to address them.

The diocese commissioned an NGO called Climate Stewards to evaluate our carbon emissions from Scope 1 – (Direct Emissions from the activities of an organisation including fuel combustion); and Scope 2 – (Indirect Emissions from electricity purchased and used by the organisation). The final report is due in February 2023 and will enable development of a carbon reduction strategy.

(xi) To measure and reduce our environmental footprint to achieve year-on-year reductions in emissions and examine what would be required to reach net zero emissions by 2030.

We will be presenting a paper to Trustees in May 2023 with recommendations for a strategy aimed at reducing emissions along with a draft action plan and timeline.

(xii) To regularly review and report on our way of working at Diocesan, school and parish level to verify our effectiveness in achieving environmental objectives.

A committee has been put in place which meets quarterly to review progress and prepare an annual report. We will work with Plymouth CAST in 2023 to compare approaches.

'And the Lord took the man and put him in the garden to fill it and keep it.'
Genesis 2:15

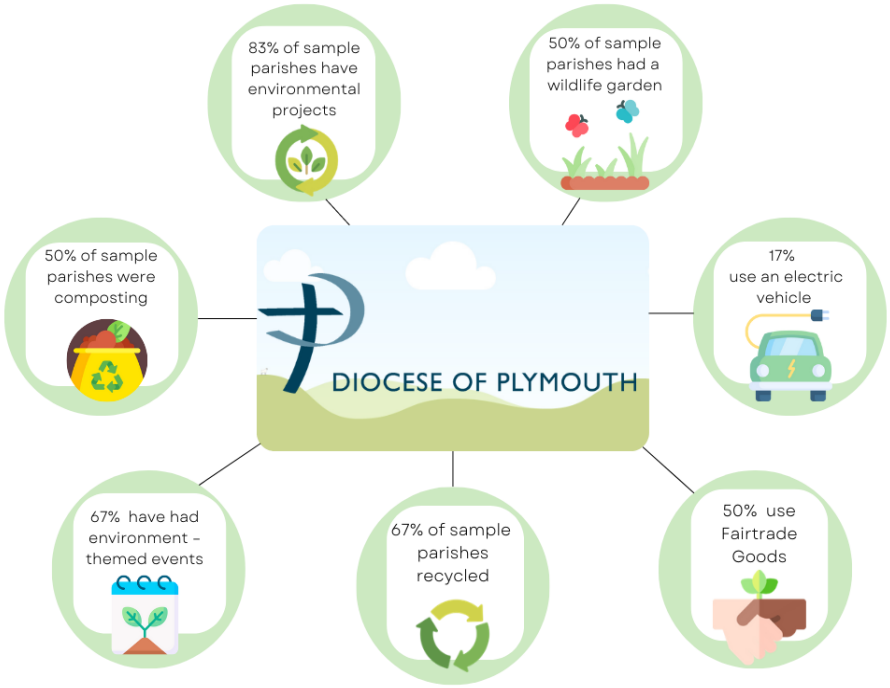
Young people from Exeter Deanery at their Season of Creation youth event in Sidmouth.

Parish Action

There is a huge amount of great work happening in our parishes.

In 2019 we conducted a parish survey that suggested 30% of parishes have taken action on the environment.

We will run a further survey in 2023 but in the interim, we conducted a random sample mini-survey with 6 parishes. The results from the mini-survey suggest that environmental issues are an increasing focus in our faith life.



Next steps

In 2023 we will:

(i) Continue to encourage progress across the diocese in the 12 priority areas set out in the policy, providing prayer resources, advice, support and encouragement.

(ii) Engage with stakeholders to design a carbon reduction strategy and action plan based on the carbon footprint analysis by Climate Stewards.

(iii) Provide resources and opportunities for prayer, reflection and action with a particular focus on Laudato Si' week and Season of Creation.

(iv) Promote the concept of integral ecology. The issue of 'the environment' cannot be taken in isolation but is part of a crisis which is both social and environmental. As a community, "we have an obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development" (Fratelli tutti #118). Each of us is called to take concrete steps – from reducing consumption to working for change – to better care for the Creation which God has entrusted to us.

(v) Revisit our parish survey and measure progress which has been made since 2019 with a view to setting realistic future goals.

(vi) Seek funding opportunities to enable parishes and groups to hold events and undertake projects to show care for our Common Home.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR ENVIRONMENTAL WORK OR WOULD LIKE TO TAKE ACTION IN YOUR SCHOOL OR PARISH COMMUNITY PLEASE CONTACT CARITAS@PRCDTR.ORG.UK

Winner of the Caritas Environment Competition, Leon Seddon from St Boniface Catholic College, Plymouth 2022

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This report has been produced by the Diocesan Environment Committee: Canon John Deeny, Jeremy Skelton, Declan Keough, Anthony Akinpelu and Deborah Fisher.

Any questions please contact caritas@prcdtr.org.uk

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