



# Environment Policy Annual Review

2023

“ *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*



## Introduction

This is the third 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; measured our carbon footprint and agreed an action plan for improvement. We continue to encourage engagement by parishes and schools in Laudato Si' Week and Season of Creation, taking action to care for our Common Home. Our Curia Offices received the CAFOD Live Simply Award—the first diocesan curia offices to do so.

## Environmental Policy Annual Review Reflection

It was Christmas Eve 1968, and the crew of the Apollo 8 spaceship was orbiting the moon. They did a live broadcast from their spaceship, which had the largest TV audience ever at the time.

One of the astronauts said, “We are now approaching lunar sunrise, and for all the people back on Earth, the crew of Apollo 8 has a message that we would like to send to you.”

The three astronauts then took turns reading the first 10 verses of the first chapter of the book of Genesis, which describes creation.

Their reading beautifully captured our belief that all creation reflects the glory of God and that it is, indeed, very good!

The irony was that while the mission's purpose was to study the moon, it was the beauty of the earth that was memorable.

One of the astronauts also took the famous photo of ‘Earth rising’. The photo reveals the great beauty of our planet in the darkness of the space which surrounds it, yet at the same time vulnerable and very delicate. The crew described it as ‘lit up like a Christmas tree ornament’.

The Church constantly reminds us to take good care of our beautiful planet. Pope Francis in his encyclical Laudato Si urges us to recognise the interconnectedness of all creation, and our role as stewards, not exploiters, of our common home. The Pope's more recent document, Laudate Deum (Praise God) is an even more urgent call to action.

All of us in the Plymouth diocese, as parishes, schools, groups or individuals can contribute to making a more sustainable and harmonious world where life can flourish and its beauty, enhanced. So much excellent work is already happening, some of which is reflected in this annual review. In a spirit of gratitude for the gift of God's creation may we continue our efforts, reflecting the love and care that God has bestowed upon His creation.

*Reflection by Canon John Deeny, Chair of the Environment Committee*

The following is a snapshot of actions taken in 2023 to take forward each of our twelve commitments: but we know that there is much more happening in our schools and parishes than we can reflect here.

*(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.*

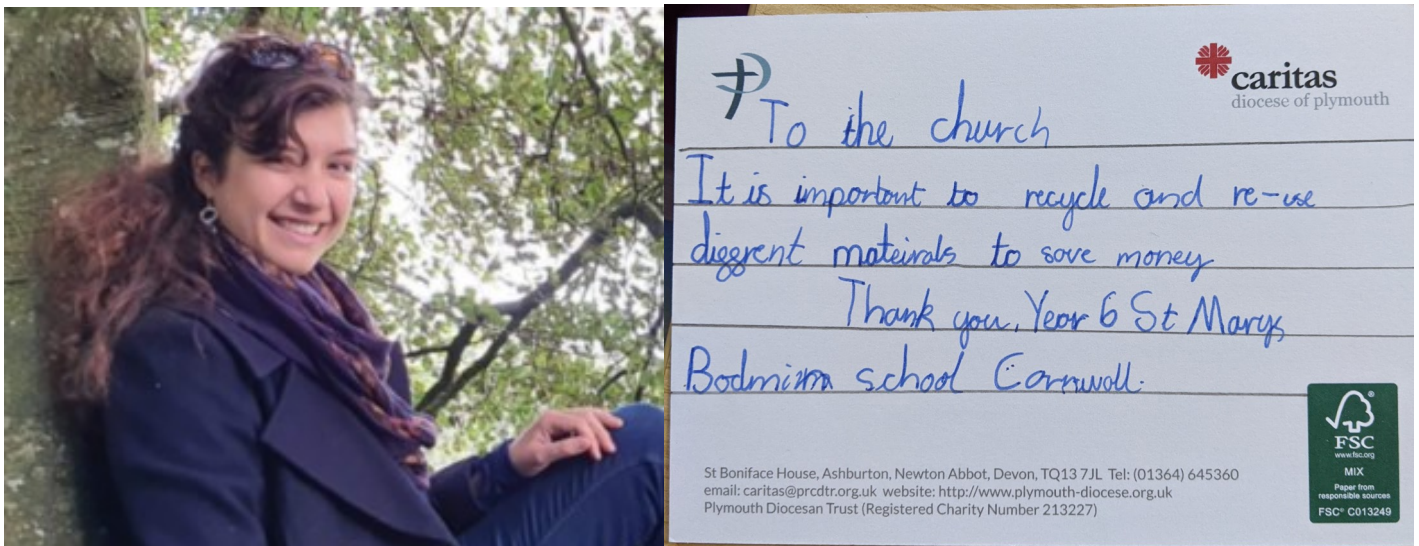
In May, Caritas organised a day of reflection at Sclerder Abbey to pray and discuss how we as a diocese can respond to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. This was a partnership event with CAFOD Plymouth. We reflected on our responsibilities as stewards of creation and discussed what the church can do to play its part. There were many different views expressed (and differences of view) but common themes around the importance of spiritual reflection and the place of LOVE at the centre of all our thought and action. We all agreed the importance of HOPE and avoidance of guilt – looking positively at what can be done. This work will form part of our longer term sustainability strategy,

*Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. Laudato Si #67*

*(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)*

We cannot address climate change without addressing global and domestic inequality. In October 2023, we held an event at St Rita's Honiton, to reflect on Pope Francis's message for World Day of the Poor. A key element of this event was a focus on social justice and how we are called to take action to challenge unfairness and inequity. The results from this event were shared online through our website. We work closely with CAFOD and promote their global justice campaigns and supported the Columban pilgrimage in Cornwall in May.

In July, a young adult parishioner was sponsored by Caritas Diocese of Plymouth, to attend this year's Justice and Peace Conference. She shared her reflections on the event and how we are called to take action to follow the example of Jesus as a steward of God's creation.



*“our care for one another and our care for the earth are intimately bound together  
(Laudate Deum #3)*

*(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 parish communities to encourage them to hold events during Laudato Si’ Week and Season of Creation. During Season of Creation 16 parishes shared information about the environment but only a few held a service or Mass to celebrate. We connected with over 120 people through face to face events and an online schools event in September reached over 1,000 pupils. We shared examples of parishes which have either followed the Live Simply Journey or undertaken other actions to share their love for God’s Creation including a case study of [Holy Family Bournemouth’s Live Simply journey](#).

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

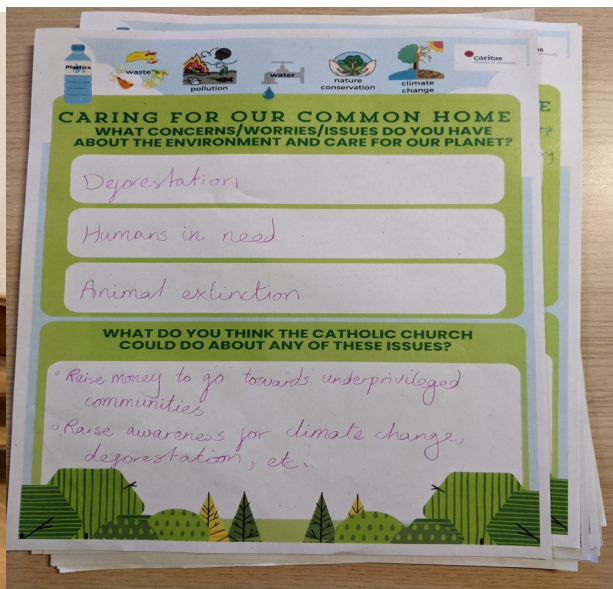
We work closely with the diocesan property team who ensure that all major decisions about building refurbishment consider the environmental impacts. Our property team proactively looks at environmentally friendly options for property management. Examples include:

- ◇ Re-using and recycling office furniture
- ◇ Working with reputable local companies for building works
- ◇ Ensuring all our properties will have EPC ratings
- ◇ Actively looking for ways to make properties more energy-efficient

There were three successful grant applications of over £40,000 in 2023 for property renovations with a direct environmental benefit including weatherproofing and insulation.

**‘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 and have received the 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 regularly collect for our local foodbank and look for other ways to reach out to those who are struggling. We promote re-using and recycling by parishes.

*(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*

The Curia offices have followed a Live Simply Journey in 2022-3 and in December received the award from CAFOD. We carried out a range of actions to show our Care for Creation (new recycling points, composting, purchasing fair trade and recycled goods; shared lunches and reflection) and throughout the year had regular collections for the local food bank. In November 2023 we held a session on Modern Slavery looking at the challenge of identifying modern slavery in our supply chains.

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

Our 2023 parish survey indicated that around 15% of our parishes have a biodiversity initiative and this is something we will be looking to develop further. In May, the diocesan curia offices and some parishes celebrated 'No Mow May' to provide a positive environment for plants and insects.

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

We work closely with the Diocesan Education Service which actively promotes Care for Creation. We have given out three Laudato' Si' Awards to schools in 2023 in recognition of their environmental work. We sent materials for Season of Creation to schools and parishes and share positive practice. We met young people at St Mary's Primary Bodmin and the diocesan summer camp to ask for their thoughts on how best to care for our common home. Children at St Mary's wrote postcards with suggestions about how the Church can take action. The children at the primary school of Our Lady and St Denis in Torquay created a display for the foyer of the Curia offices for Season of Creation.



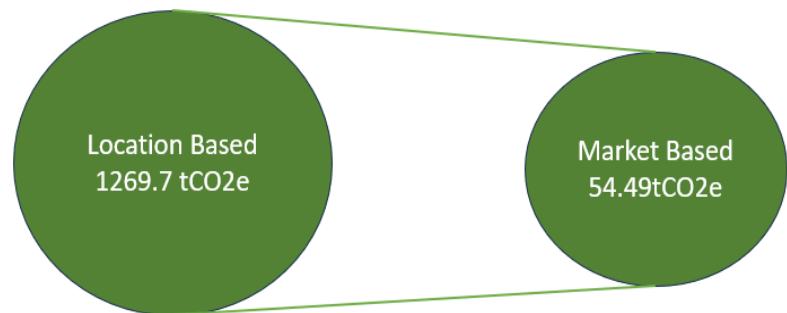
*ix) To ensure that our investment policies adhere to ethical guidelines and promote investment for social benefit.*

We reviewed our investment policy in 2023 and Trustees keep it under consideration in the light of new guidance issued by the Vatican—Mensuram Bonam. We work closely with the Church Investment Fund and others to understand and implement best practice. We work to tackle modern slavery in our supply chains and raise awareness of the need to monitor the environmental, social and economic impact of our investments.

*(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.*

We have evaluated 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). We conducted a small parish survey to estimate the cost of other emissions generated by the work of our parishes. Climate Stewards calculated our Carbon Footprint for 2019 and 2023 (figures below). They estimate a carbon reduction of 18% over that three year period. We are using both location and market-based figures. The market based footprint calculation takes into account our Green Energy contract with British Gas.

We have developed an initial plan for our journey to carbon neutrality. The Curia offices have tracked all our printing and are taking actions to reduce this. We will be considering travel, and other measures as part of the development of a wider sustainability strategy in 2024.



*(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.*

The Diocesan Trustees funded an external consultant to assist the diocese in calculating our Carbon Footprint following the guidelines developed by Salford Diocese Guardians of Creation project. In June 2023, Trustees signed off an initial road-map for our journey to carbon neutrality which will be further developed by the Environment and Property Committees in 2024.

*(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 meets quarterly to review progress and prepare an annual report. We report regularly to Trustees who take a close interest in this work.

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

## Parish Action

Many of our parishes actively promote care for the environment through liturgy and events. Holy Family parish in Penzance won grant funding to create a new community garden as part of their building works. The Exeter CAFOD/Live Simply group organised an Ecumenical Service of Creation at Blessed Sacrament Church as part of Season of Creation. Other parishes have beautiful gardens, wildflower areas. One parish said:

*“We have a garden that is currently maintained by a man who was homeless and he wants to give something back to the community that has supported him - gives him an opportunity to show his talents and his work brings joy not only our community but to all people who pass the church. The fruitfulness of God's Grace in so many ways. “*

However in our 2023 survey, only 15% of parishes said that they had an environmental project or space where they encourage biodiversity. We hope to encourage more to develop their green spaces in 2024

## Next steps

### **In 2024 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) Promote a wider understanding of Catholic social teaching and the importance of acting as stewards of creation through a programme of events and sharing of information and materials.
- (iii) Provide resources and opportunities for prayer, reflection and action with a particular focus on Laudato Si' week and Season of Creation.
- (vi) Seek funding opportunities to enable parishes and groups to hold events and undertake projects to show care for our Common Home.
- (vii) Support the ongoing work to reduce our carbon footprint.
- (viii) Engage with a wide range of parishioners to get their views on a wider diocesan sustainability strategy
- (ix) Provide support to Trustees in their reflections on ethical investment.



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

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*January 2024*