

## **St Ninian and St Cuthbert's Journey To A Silver Eco Award**

If a to do list was given St Ninian and St Cuthbert's Care for Creation group at our first meeting with all that would be accomplished in the coming year, we would probably have given up before getting started. It would have seemed too much. Obviously that didn't happen. Instead we simply acted on one idea at a time. Frequently a door opened and an opportunity presented itself to make the idea a reality. If a door didn't open, the idea remained an idea.

Journeying towards an Eco Award has been an animating and uplifting experience for the Care For Creation Group. It has involved a lot of work but the fruits have been abundant. It has felt like the Holy Spirit was at our back pushing us forward. Working for our common home from a spiritual dimension really has opened up opportunities for us to build unity and presents a new way of sharing the Gospel message to others .

### **SCIAF Workshops**

Prior to starting the Care for Creation group, SCIAF were invited to present their Integral Human Development workshops. These were successful in raising awareness of the needs in the global south and provided insight into how the work of SCIAF empowers people to help themselves.

### **Laudato Si**

The motivation for starting a Care For creation group came from Pope Francis's encyclical, Laudato Si - Care For Our Common Home. In it he said that global warming is only one symptom of the crisis humanity is facing which is broken relationships with God, with one another and with creation. Renewing relationships lies at the heart of tackling our global crisis and an understanding that everything is interconnected.

### **Eco Congregation**

EcoCongregation's checklist was used to establish where we were in our eco journey and to direct us in how to move forward. We registered with EcoCongregation but as we made progress we became members so that we were eligible to apply for an award.

### **Raising Awareness**

After reviewing the checklist, it became clear that raising awareness of ecology issues was a priority. The Season of Creation gave us an opportunity to do that. Five evening events were organised for adult parishioners and three day events for children. We also launched our monthly Eco Newsletter and Children's Eco-Comic. The first page of the newsletter is spiritually based looking at creation from a spiritual dimension. The second page gives green tips, a plant based recipe, gardening tips, how and where to recycle, parish, local, national and international eco news. Page two of the newsletter is displayed in the local community centre. The comic addresses ecology in a child friendly way.

We wrote and distributed energy information sheets on how to reduce energy bills to the parish and to a local charity.

### **The Wider Community**

We inserted ourselves into two resident and tenant associations, two local charities, two community garden projects and South Lanarkshires Network Links. People know we are parishioners of St Ninian and St Cuthbert's but we never open a conversation about faith. We simply get to know people through sharing skills and working alongside them. We have been surprised how readily people have spoken to us of their own beliefs, motivations and personal experiences. As St John Henry Newman said, we hope we leave the fragrance of Jesus as we pass through the community.

The growing relationship with the community has led to our parishioners donating over one hundred gifts for children and over one hundred packages of essential goods to the homeless in our area. The hall was made available for a local charity to distribute food from on Christmas Eve and our parishioners supported this by collecting food donations from various supermarkets. Our parishioners continue to support One World and SVDP. We are not a wealthy parish but the parishioners are generous.

We work in the community with the conviction that “Where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in their midst. We go beyond the church walls to become church into the community.

### **Ecumenical Involvement**

Before the Season of Creation last year, we had one ecumenical event on our calendar. In trying to develop a fuller relationship with our neighbouring Church of Scotland, the Care For Creation Group prepared an ecumenical Taize Service and invited the Church of Scotland to join us. The minister was a celebrant along with our parish Priest and the chaplain of the local SyroMalabar Community.

The Church of Scotland has since started its own Care for Creation Group and asked us to share our experience of working towards an Eco award with them. They already attend our Care For Creation meetings and we work together in the wider community groups. We recently collaborated on presenting a four week Bible study course on creation, The Tenants of The King, to our two parishes.

The Church of Scotland and the local Coptic Church also were also invited to our screening of 'The Letter.'

### **Youth Work**

The Parish and local schools were already working collaboratively on the Caritas award , Pope Francis Medal and Laudato Si as well as the Parish having a Children's Liturgy group. We wanted to expand on the work already taking place. A monthly Eco Comic was prepared that places an emphasis on hope rather than climate anxiety. The monthly Sunday cafe has been used to do eco activities with the children including four sessions of No Gas Cooking, making an earth cube and an eco rainbow to fill in and monitor their eco activities. During Advent, the children received The Way To The Crib Calendar which gave them a task each day to spiritually prepare themselves for Christmas. They were also invited to their own Stations of the Cross in the Parish grounds during the year.

### **Networking**

Networking is an essential part of how we work. We tap into what is already available. We took advice from St Ninian's Church in Dundee who had a silver award. The chairman of their Pastoral Council visited our church to advise us on applying for a CARES grant to make the Church and Church hall more energy sufficient. We share our Eco Comic with two schools. The Way to the Crib calendar was used by several parishes. Energy saving help sheets produced for the Parish were shared with Hillhouse Residents Association and pinned up in the Community Centre .

We are happy for others to take our ideas forward. There were several craft clubs in the area used solely by women, but nothing for men. We suggested to a local charity we had a good working relationship with that a Mens woodwork group would be a good initiative to start. Two of our members have supported this by offering their skills while learning new ones. We have formed links with other craft groups in the area (see below) and supported one by giving them resources they lacked.

### **Craft Club**

The knitting group in the parish was started to make blankets for the Sisters of the Gospel of Life. It was decided to expand this into a craft group while still supporting the original project. The Craft Group attracts a number of women from the parish as well as from the Church of Scotland, the Baptist Church and those with no religious affiliation. It networks with three other knitting groups in the area who knit squares for us to sew into blankets. There are also numerous individuals who don't attend any of the clubs but hand in squares.

The blankets go, not only to the Sisters of the Gospel of Life, but also to climate disaster areas as well as being given to local migrant families who are ill prepared for the winters in Scotland

The wool used is recycled and nothing goes to waste. Squares that cannot be made into blankets are made into twiddle muffs and taken to local hospitals or care homes to be used by dementia

patients. Other craft work is sold at the One World Group's Martinmas Fair and proceeds are sent to SCIAF or Marys Meals.

The Craft Club is also a social gathering. It is a warm and welcoming group and parishioners and others quickly feel a part of it.

While the Craft Group is meeting, a Guitar Group meets in another room. The Craft Group asked the guitarists if they would play for them before Christmas. They offered to do a concert. To make it more of an occasion the women baked and provided a tea and cake at the concert. Another concert was arranged before the summer but this time all the knitting groups which support our blanket project were also invited. The women baked and offered hospitality to approximately 40 people who joined us. SVDP have now asked for the guitar group to play at an event they have organised. There is only one parishioner in the Guitar Group but they have inserted themselves into the social life of the parish now through a simple invitation to let the Craft Group hear them play

### **Other Groups in The Parish**

The aim of a Care for Creation Group is to deepen three fundamental relationships; our relationships with God, with one another and with creation. There are other groups in the parish whose work overlaps with ours.

SVDP serve the poor and have a special understanding of financial difficulties in the parish and wider community. Every month parishioners donate food, toiletries and cleaning materials which SVDP distribute to a local food bank or directly to people who they know are in need. Sometimes money is the pressing concern for someone and SVDP are sensitive to recognising this.

The Legion Of Mary, amongst other things, play an important role in connecting with parishioners who are no longer able to attend mass. Their visits to care homes and hospitals provide important spiritual nourishment.

Through many small fund raising ventures the One World group supports the Parish's Mary's Meals' kitchen in Malawi. Twice a year they organise an Afternoon Tea. These events are well supported by parishioners and others. Parishioners donate home baking and gifts for a tombola. It has become an important way of coming together and building community and there are never enough tickets to support the demand for it.

The Children's Liturgy Group works hard to make the Sunday readings meaningful to the children. It invites the children to a children's version of the stations of the cross. It gently raises awareness of their responsibility to care for God's creation through developing an appreciation of the wonders of nature. The children care for their own Mary's Garden and there is a plan for them to cultivate their own wild flower garden.

### **Beauty and Nature**

We are very fortunate to have an artist as one of our members. The Burning Bush was the theme of the 2022 Season of Creation and she produced a beautiful painting to illustrate this. Over the year, the Eco Newsletter reflected on the Canticle of the Creatures by St Francis. This was enhanced by more of her art work. Thomas Merton's journey to faith started by him engaging with a mosaic he saw in Rome and we recognise the power that art and beauty can have on opening up the soul to God.

We have a keen gardener in the parish who ensures our garden is ablaze with flowers from spring to autumn. As mentioned above, the children have their own little garden to care for.

We have developed a very strong relationship with the local park ranger who has offered to take us on guided nature walks. We invited a local charity and the Church of Scotland to join us on the first walk in the local woods. We have arranged more walks with the park ranger as well as arranging for her to do two craft activities using things gathered from the park; one with children and one with adults.

### **Suggestions To Other Parishes Starting A Care For Creation Group**

St Ninian and St Cuthbert's Parish has recently received a Silver EcoCongregation Award. This is the first time this award has been given to a parish in Motherwell Diocese and the third time a Catholic parish in Scotland has received an EcoCongregation award. The parish was commended for four different aspects of the work it has done. These were for :-

- The connection to the wider community and local community projects.
- The ecumenical connections and joint working with other churches.
- The active involvement of young people and the activities for them, including the Eco- Comic, the involvement of Pope Francis and Caritas award pupils.
- The high levels of energy, creativity and commitment from the group and their willingness to act as an example of an active Catholic eco-congregation

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The experience of the past year has been animating and uplifting. We certainly put in a lot of work but the fruits have been abundant. It has felt like the Holy Spirit has been at our back pushing us forward.

We are convinced that working for our common home from a spiritual dimension really opens up opportunities of building unity in our world and presents a new way of sharing the Gospel message to others .

## **Below is a list of suggestions or advice on how to work towards an Eco Award in your parish**

### **Parish Groups**

Care for Creation is the responsibility of the whole parish. If the parish doesn't have a SVDP group, Legion of Mary, Children's Liturgy, One World Group etc try to set these or other groups up to take ahead different aspects of care for creation.

**Screen 'The Letter'. "This beautiful film – a heartbreaking yet hopeful story – is a clarion cry to people everywhere: wake up! get serious! act together! act now!" CARD. MICHAEL CZERNY**

- interest in the global crisis can be stimulated by screening the 'The Letter' ( Pope Francis) in the parish. The film is free to watch on YouTube but due to copyrights, you need to download a copyright free version. This download does not require the internet to screen it. Details of how to host a screening can be found at..... <https://www.theletterfilm.org/screenings/>
- Provide hospitality and a discussion time in groups.
- Ask people what action you can take individually or as a parish.

### **Following the screening of 'The Letter'**

- Advertise in the bulletin for people interested in joining a Laudato Si Circle/Care For Creation Group but remember some people will respond better to a personal invitation.
- Recognise what is already working in the parish and build on it.
- Recognise and use the different talents of parishioners.

### **EcoCongregation**

- Register with Eco Congregation,
- Download their checklist and assess where there is good practice in your parish.
- Use the checklist to keep you on task. One step at a time is enough.

### **Integral Human Development Two SCIAF Workshops**

- SCIAF have developed two excellent workshops on Integral Human Development. These could be used to further raise awareness in your parish.

## **Youth**

- Try to engage with the youth but meet them “where they are”. Many are experiencing anxiety due to the ecological crisis and from the pressures of social media. From the perspective of faith, hope can be offered and they can see the crisis from a different perspective and a way to act to bring change.
- If you don't have a Children's Liturgy Group or a working partnership with the local schools over the Caritas And the Pope Francis Awards? What can be done to offer Caritas pupils a meaningful engagement with parish life?
- **Start An Eco Newsletter**
- This will raise awareness of parish, local, national and international ecological issues
- This will tick a lot of boxes on EcoCongregations checklist

## **Start An Eco Comic**

- no need to reinvent the wheel. We are happy to share what we have produced

## **Ecumenical Engagement**

- Pope Francis says that there can be no evangelisation without ecumenism.
- Invite other denominations to shared worship and other events or activities.

## **Get into the wider community**

- Bring the presence of the church into the wider community by getting involved with resident associations, council groups and charity groups already operating
- Invite others to parish based activities like craft groups, afternoon teas, etc.
- Organise nature walks
- Share ideas with other groups that are better placed to take them ahead. Support them where you can and share skills but let them turn the conversation to faith if they want, not you. St Francis said the last arrow to be fired is the word.

## **Bring The Community To Us**

People will come more readily to the hall than to the church. Our church halls can be the place where the local community and the church meet. We need to use our halls wisely to help build good relationships between the church and the wider community.