

Making space for nature

Across Bath and Wells our churches are working with local communities and schools to care for the environment, with more than a third of churches in the diocese engaged with the Wilder Churches project. Launched in 2021 with Somerset Wildlife Trust, it offers free online training sessions to help communities learn more about the land in their churchyards and burial grounds, appreciate its wildlife value, and explore ways to enhance the biodiversity.

Churchyards are often the oldest enclosed parcels of land in a parish. Unaffected by agricultural changes, they often have diverse ecosystems containing wildflowers, ancient trees, a variety of wildlife,



and provide habitats for numerous species. These natural ecosystems contribute to clean air, and water, and often provide good carbon storage.

Sara Emmett, Climate Justice & Environment Advisor for the Diocese of Bath and Wells says, "Our churchyards form a network of pockets of space for nature within the heart of our communities and for our communities. They are vital for species and habitat survival as

well as for people to connect with our world. Every churchyard that supports nature in its care and management is contributing to this bigger picture and even the smallest actions make a difference."

Hundreds have taken part in the Wilder Churches online training sessions and get-togethers or watched the recorded sessions.

This year the diocesan Environment and Everyday Faith teams plan to hold interactive sessions in parishes, to provide young people with the opportunity to learn more about caring for God's earth with practical sessions on constructing bird boxes, bug hotels, and more. Find out more at bathandwells.org.uk/environment

News in brief

Green dates for your diary

The Great Big Green Week (8 to 16 June)

- a celebration of community action to tackle climate change. Come together to show the heartfelt, everyday actions being taken to stand up for nature and fight climate change.

Churches Count on Nature 2024, part of Love Your Burial Ground Week (8-16 June)

focuses on the wildlife to be found in churchyards. It is a joint initiative promoted by Caring for God's Acre, the Church of England, the Church in Wales and A Rocha UK.

Net Zero Week (6-12 July 2024), the UK's official national awareness week, brings together all the stakeholders needed to reach net zero by 2050, and to ensure Britain's energy is both secure and affordable ■

Supporting the community

Revd Deborah Perreau, Deanery Mission Priest for Somerset South, has received a Community Resilience Award from Somerset Council in acknowledgment of her exceptional efforts following severe flooding in the area in 2021. Deborah has collaborated with local agencies, secured additional funding for emergency flood resources, and facilitated opportunities for people to share their experiences. "It was vital that care and compassion were our outer garments but even more so a listening ear. The church takes in the battered and bruised and sends us out restored and with resilience." ■

Find out more on these and other stories at bathandwells.org.uk/news

Caring for those working at sea

More than 400 gift boxes filled by church communities in Bath and Wells have been shared with sailors who came to Royal Portbury and Avonmouth Docks near Bristol so this winter.

Chaplains from the Mission to Seafarers also gave out hundreds of warm hats, scarves and gloves, all knitted volunteers in the diocese. Fr Jeremy Hellier said, "95% of everything we use comes by sea, those who work on the ships that deliver the goods will be far away from their loved ones at for many months at a time." ■

Our precious gift

By Alastair Redfern, Assistant Bishop for the Diocese of Bath and Wells

As Christians, while we may look to reduce our own carbon footprint, we are called to be stewards and witnesses of a much more radical resource. The clue is in the word 'ecology'.

'Eco' comes from the Greek word oikos, meaning house, or dwelling place. Ecology is partly about our responsibility to recognise the precious gift of the Earth, as our dwelling place: to be thankful, and play our part. God made humankind to care for the earthly world: Jesus amplifies the call, as He uses 'nature' as the sign of how we can live in order to flourish and to fulfil God's will.

'Logy' comes from a Greek word logos interpreted as reason, the ordering of knowledge, logic. In

John's Gospel, logos is a word to describe Jesus – through whom all things are made and from whom all true knowledge comes. Logos is the word, the source of all goodness and grace, for every human life, and for all of creation.

It is the 'logos', the word, who inhabits our lives, our creation – inviting us to recognise His light, and allow it to overcome the darkness of our own limited concerns and agendas. We meet the logos in scripture, in worship, in prayer, and deeper reflection.

In Jesus, as logos, we can find the wisdom, the resources and the commitment to play our part in caring for creation. We are able to invite others to recognise the deeper truths about Eco, our common dwelling place, and to

see more clearly how we join with others to work out what to do, how to live, and honour the gift of life that we receive through Him. The Logos is the possibility of good news for humankind and the Earth.

What a responsibility each Christian disciple is called to bear! And what grace can be ours to enable us to fulfil our calling, and help all of God's children become caught up in the praise and prayer that gives true life to our dwelling place, and to exercise our stewardship appropriately.

Read John 1v1-14. Become an ECO-warrior – committed our common dwelling place – through celebrating the power and presence of the LOGOS.

ECOLOGY: we know it makes sense ■ **Bishop Alastair**

Making a difference

Pippa Rayner, Wilder Projects Coordinator for Somerset Wildlife Trust, talks about our partnership.

What is Wilder Churches?

It is a partnership initiative between Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Diocese of Bath and Wells to provide a series of training sessions aimed at anyone interested in taking action for nature in their local churchyard, burial ground or other church land. We want to help people understand how important these spaces can be.

What has the reaction been to it?

We started with a launch session in 2021 and had an amazing reaction to that. People have continued to take part or have been able to catch up because we recorded all the training and we also run regular sessions for new communities.

What's been very rewarding is that people have been finding habitats they never knew were there.



Is that the reaction you expected?

We were absolutely delighted with the response. We provided support so that they have access to advice, with the wider benefit of not just doing something in their local churchyard but doing it as part of something that's happening across the whole diocese.

What has been the most surprising thing you have found out in running Wilder Churches?

The Somerset Botany Group approached us and asked if they could offer surveys for communities, which was great. They got round a lot of sites and found some amazing

things, which was absolutely fantastic and just shows why these places are so special.

Is it a lot for a church to do?

No. You can start small. Even churches that don't have grassy areas can have flowerpots planted with bee friendly plants. It's important enthusiasm doesn't cause people to rush in and change things without having time to understand the space and the communities. We support any action the community decides to take and help them find what will work best and how to do that.

Any advice for someone looking to take part?

Always talk to your church leader and those already involved. Ask who currently manages that space and who currently decides how it is managed ■

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