



ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP UPDATES

"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, ENCYCLICAL LETTER LAUDATO SI' ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME



OUR DEG GROUP

The Diocesan Environmental Group was established in 2020 to support the Diocese in taking concerted action to address the climate and ecological emergency, recognising the call by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* to care for our common home, and meets regularly.

"I thank our Diocesan Environmental Group and the many parish and school groups who have been reflecting on caring for our common home. I am aware that pilot projects are beginning to see how local communities can respond in practical ways to lower carbon footprints and increase the abundance of nature in our grounds". - Bishop Stephen, Pastoral Letter on The Season of Creation and Thanksgiving - BISHOP STEPHEN WRIGHT

WORDS FROM OUR CHAIR

◀◀ FR CHRIS HUGHES

It has been an honour to have been Chair of the DEG since its foundation in 2020. It has been a joy to work with the Bishop, clergy and many lay people who are enthusiastically responding to Pope Francis' call to respond to the cry of the earth and the poor. In May of this year, we will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Laudato Si'*.

Pope Francis has awakened in deep and vital relation between humanity and the environment, of which we are part. The depth and importance of the living web of interconnectedness between all of creation and our heavenly creator is profound, beautiful, and mysterious. In damaging creation, we are insulting God. Many people have been inspired by his call. However, there is much work to be done. As I type, devastating fires are destroying huge parts of Los Angeles. Scientists have recently stated how the global rise in temperature has gone beyond the figure of 1.5 degrees agreed at the Paris Conference in 2015. All of this is very concerning. We will have events to give thanks for the great work that has been done and pray for the strength and wisdom to respond faithfully to the challenges and opportunities of this present time. Thank you!



RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY LOSS

By Chris Myers, DEG Member

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Two recent reports indicate how far we are off track in addressing the climate and nature crises:

1. Key Findings from the Emissions Gap Report 2024 by the UN Environment Programme:

- Insufficient Climate Pledges: Current climate pledges known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are insufficient to meet the Paris Agreement targets. If fully implemented, they would only limit global warming to 2.6-2.8°C by 2100.
- Need for Increased Ambition: To limit warming to 1.5°C, global greenhouse gas emissions must be cut by 42% by 2030, 57% by 2035 compared to 2019 levels. For a 2°C target, emissions need to reduce by 28% by 2030.
- Technological Potential: There is significant potential for emissions reductions via investments in solar/ wind energy, forestry, building reforms, transport, and industry.
- Role of G20 Nations: The largest-emitting G20 countries must lead in cutting emissions.
- Rapid Action Required: Nations must rapidly increase their climate pledges and implement them to avoid catastrophic warming. Every fraction of a degree matters in terms of lives saved, economies protected, and biodiversity conserved.

2. The Living Planet Report 2024 by WWF highlights some alarming findings about the state of global wildlife populations:

- 73% Decline in Wildlife Populations: Since 1970, there has been an average decline of 73% in global wildlife populations. This indicates a severe loss of biodiversity and the impact of human activities on ecosystems.
 - Critical Threats to Biodiversity: Habitat loss, climate change, overexploitation, and pollution are the primary threats to biodiversity.
 - Urgent Need for Action: to prevent ecological tipping points and halt the decline in wildlife populations.
 - Economic and Food Systems Transformation: current economic and food systems need to be more sustainable.
 - Approaching Tipping Points: The Earth is approaching dangerous tipping points that pose grave threats to humanity and nature. The report underscores the importance of meeting global goals on nature, climate, and sustainable development by 2030 to address these critical issues.
- Unfortunately, two key international conferences held in the Autumn 2024: COP16 & COP29 made only limited progress in addressing these critical issues.

[Click here](#) to read or download Chris Myer's full report and outcomes from COP16 and COP29.



CARITAS HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE FUND

By Reverend Fr Andrian Tuckwell, Episcopal Vicar for CARITAS

Three years ago, the diocese established the Caritas Hexham and Newcastle Fund to support parish based projects helping people and the planet. To date 20+ organisations have benefited from grants. While the majority of the grants have been focused on supporting people through projects working with people, such as those seeking asylum, poverty, isolation etc a few grants have had protecting the planet as their focus. A school received a grant to help transform part of their school grounds into an allotment and more natural habitat and funding was also made available to train people in Carbon Literacy.

The next round of funding is open and applications are welcome from any parish seeking to use their grounds in a sustainable way, improve the way in which they operate with energy or simply become more conscious of the needs of the planet. If you would like to know more do visit the Caritas Fund pages of the diocesan website or contact me via email evcaritas@diocesehn.org.uk. The final date for applications is 31st July for payment of the grant in September.



St Benet Biscop Partnership held a conference “Caring for our Common Home” on Sep 14 2024 at St Bedes Bedlington, attended by 32 people across our Partnership including St Benet Biscop Academy School.

The first half focused on what is happening to our common home from a scientific and faith perspective. Chris Myers highlighted the record temperatures in 2023 & 2024 with extreme weather causing much suffering especially in the global south. We must act now to reduce emissions, restore nature to avoid catastrophic climate breakdown. Scientists have identified 9 planetary boundaries which are crucial to sustain life on earth. We can navigate towards a brighter future if we have the courage, wisdom and vision to act now.

Fr Chris Hughes explored the theological/spiritual resources which enable us to meet the climate and nature crisis. He explored how spiritual/ material dichotomy has not always been helpful in enabling a faith-based response. He spoke of a “God in all things” and the need to appreciate the sacred dimension of God’s creation which leads us to a sense of awe, beauty, wonder and gratitude. Finally, Fr Chris spoke about the call in Laudato Si’ for an ecological conversion – to live in harmony with each other and the whole of creation.

Attendees then had the opportunity to reflect on the two sessions and consider how the world could be transformed by 2050 if we make the right decisions now.

The second part of the morning focused on the actions we can take to live more sustainably. Rachel Blaylock, our CAFOD regional coordinator spoke about CAFOD’s Live Simply Award which encourages Parishes and Schools to engage in faith inspired actions focused on living simply, sustainably and in solidarity with people around the world experiencing poverty. Representatives from different groups then shared how they were seeking to Care for our Common Home: Brigid Duffy (Academy Chaplain) spoke about the Laudato Si’ Award which had been introduced in the School, Neil Hurn (Esh Green Team) described the work to enhance biodiversity in their 3 Parish grounds, Dot Fahey (St Wilfrid, Blyth) spoke of community work by the Knitters & Natterers and Clare Myers (Our Lady & St Joseph, New Hartley) described the changes she has made to live more simply.

Attendees were then given leaflets with sustainable living tips to share within the Parishes along with an invitation for parishioners to make pledges to live more sustainably.

Finally, a Partnership Mass for Creation Care led by Fr Quinn was held at St Wilfrid, Blyth on Oct 11. 40 people attended, along with 120 pledges to live sustainably which were offered during the Mass as our commitment to our Common Home. We appreciated the artwork produced by the Academy and St Wilfrid Primary School along with their pledges. The Partnership Council consider the conference to have been a success – we recognise the need to engage with everyone in our Partnership, Schools and Parishes if we are to make a real impact on the climate and ecological crisis. We plan to follow this up with an event to celebrate the Jubilee Year 2025 – a year of hope for people and planet. Chris Myers, Partnership Council email: chrisj.myers57@gmail.com

“YOU ARE INVITED TO GET INVOLVED WITH CAFOD’S LIVE SIMPLY AWARD.” - BISHOP STEPHEN, SEASON OF CREATION, PASTORAL LETTER



LIVE SIMPLY AWARD - CAFOD

By Rachel Blaylock, Community Participation Coordinator

As Bishop Stephen mentioned in his Season of Creation Pastoral letter, you are invited to get involved with CAFOD’s Live Simply Award. The Live Simply Award is a scheme for communities, schools and parishes that can show how they have been living: The Bishops’ Conference commends the LiveSimply Award as a response to Pope Francis’ invitation in Laudato Si’ to “work with generosity and tenderness in protecting this world which God has entrusted to us”. Recognising the good work already going on, the bishops encourage all remaining schools and parishes to consider signing up to this award as a sign of their solidarity with the poor and their desire to live in harmony with God’s creation.

How can we Live Simply in 2025?

We can consider the impact of our actions – or lack of action! – on our global family today and tomorrow.

We can reflect on what we have, what we consume and whether we need more – we live in a very immediate and a materialistic world, and the impact on this is something that is often overlooked. Therefore, we can take time to reflect on what impact our actions have on others and on our common home.

Our website has lots of suggestions for exploring this. These range from ideas for incorporating care for creation into your parish’s prayer life, to recommendations for reducing waste and tackling pollution, through to organising moments in your parish to celebrate nature or call for action to care for our common home. For more information, please visit: <https://cafod.org.uk/campaign/livesimply-award>

DIOCESAN SCHOOLS PROJECTS

By Michelle Ross, Primary RE and Ethos adviser

All schools have been encouraged by Bishop Stephen to look at how their school can impact the global family, their local and school community as they reflect the teachings of Jesus, Catholic social teaching and Laudato Si', by working towards the LiveSimply award.

During the Spring Term of 2024, all RE Subject Leaders were asked to sign up to the LiveSimply award. The award enables schools to live out the principles of Catholic Social Teaching by living simply, sustainability and stand in solidarity with communities around the world experiencing poverty.

Between October 2018 and November 2023, 4 schools in our Diocese had gained the LiveSimply Award with a further 14 schools signed up and working towards the award. Subsequently, since the information sharing was delivered by Siobhan Farnell, LiveSimply for schools coordinator, 7 schools have now achieved the award, 48 schools have submitted their action plan and they are working towards the award and a further 18 schools have signed up to take part in the award. As the most recently awarded school, St Godric's, Durham have said: "We were thrilled to receive the award. During the last twelve months the children have all taken part in global, community and school-based projects to care for their common home and stand in solidarity with their sister's and brother's around the world.

On a global level, we all took part in the Big Lenten Walk, raising lots of money for charity. More locally, we collected a huge amount of batteries and made generous donations to Feeding Families.

"WE WROTE PRAYERS TO SHOW HOW WE WOULD LIVE SIMPLY AND HAVE SUPPORTED LOTS OF CHARITIES THIS YEAR TO HELP THOSE IN NEED."
JAMES, YEAR 5

James, Year 5 said, "We wrote prayers to show how we would live simply and have supported lots of charities this year to help those in need." All of the children's actions were supported by the CAFOD Catholic Social Teaching principles which helped them understand and reflect on the choices they made. The assessment day was a lovely opportunity to share some of the fabulous work we have been doing in school." It is hoped that all schools within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle will gain the LiveSimply award. Our hope is that if our children can learn at a young age, how to live simply, sustainably and stand in solidarity with those who experience poverty, we are paving the way for Laudato Si' to become a reality.

PARISH ENERGY CONSUMPTION & CARBON FOOTPRINT

By Chris Myers DEG Member Advocate

Over the past couple of years, the DEG have been collecting energy data from Parishes to enable the energy consumption of our Diocese and its associated carbon footprint to be estimated. We have so far received and analysed energy data for 70 Churches for the period 2019-2023 and will be continuing to do this in future years.

Please see table below:

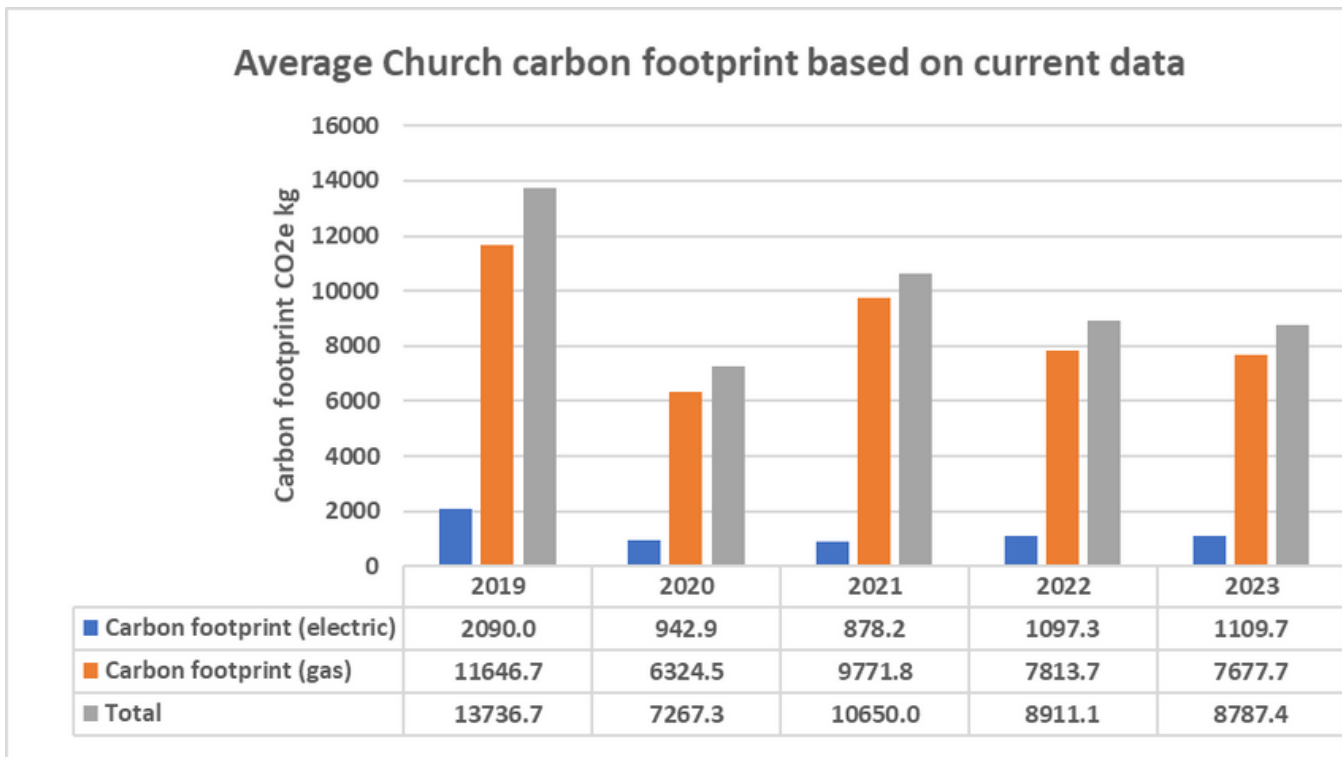
For more information, or if you would like to contribute to this exercise, please contact:

Chris Myers; email: chrisj.myers57@gmail.com

"Many of our parishes are already signed up to the Inter-diocesan Fuel Management (IFM), the Catholic Church's energy procurement group, which has been running for many years now. This scheme ensures the electricity and gas used by our properties has been purchased from renewable sources. In other dioceses all parishes purchase their energy through this method. I invite all our parishes and schools to do the same."

Bishop Stephen, Pastoral Letter for the Season of Creation Sep 2024

A full copy of the energy report is available to [view or download here](#).



➤➤➤ PARISH CHURCH GROUNDS PROJECT - ESH GREEN TEAM

By Karen Thompson, Green Team and Parishioner at St John Boste, West Durham

The Green Team in the parish of St John Boste, West Durham continues to strive to bring Laudato Si' to life & incorporate care of Creation into all we do. Our 'Church Grounds Project', running since 2022, was set up with the intention of encouraging wildlife & diversity in our 3 church grounds (in Esh Laude, Esh Winning & Ushaw Moor), to provide spaces for prayer and contemplation, and to engage parishioners, schools and the wider community.

In this time we have been successful in a 2 year &, more recently, a further 1 year grant from mid-Durham Area Action Partnership, which has allowed us to work in partnership with Durham Wildlife Trust. They have helped us by leading regular task days, which involve active participation of a number of volunteers (ages range from 6 to 90). The tasks have varied greatly! For example: creating a wildflower meadow; building a path, complete with woven edging; managing invasive, non-native species (such as Himalayan Balsam); helping clean & repaint the grotto to Our Lady; managing ancient grassland, to allow the flowers within there to flourish...plus many more. For 2025, one of our first task days will be spent planting willow beside a small waterway within one of our church grounds.

Engagement sessions are also planned with local schools, families & our village communities. Examples to date are wreath-making events, a woodland walk & talk, bat nights & 'bioblitzes' (surveys of flora & fauna).

Our Project received an award at Durham County Council's Environment Award ceremony last year, winning in the category 'Nature in Places and Spaces'. It has been beneficial for physical & mental health, helping people connect with nature & each other, making new friendships as well as creating spaces to find rest and peace. In this Jubilee Year, it is hoped that our work will contribute to our parish 're-establishing a proper relationship with God, with one another, and with all of creation'.

If anyone feels their church grounds could be enhanced further for Creation & is interested in taking action, the Green Team would be happy to share their experiences & learning further.

Please email stjohnbostegreenteam@gmail.com

LET'S PONDER



CAN WE REALLY BE PILGRIMS OF HOPE IN CLIMATE CRISIS?

By Minnie Fraser Diocesan Environmental Lead and DEG Member <<<

Under the constant barrage of bad news relating to climate change, climate injustice, and loss of biodiversity, it is unsurprising that many people feel depressed and anxious about the future. The scale of the problem and the seeming inaction of governments leads to feelings of helplessness and impotence - how can individuals make any difference at all in the context of global climate breakdown? These feelings can make one feel that it is pointless even trying showing that despair can paralyse and prevent us from taking action. In this Jubilee Year, we are called to be Pilgrims of Hope, and I am convinced that not only is this possible, but once we get into the mindset, it will be uplifting and joy-giving.

The good news is that hope exists, and by making changes to our lifestyles, each one of us can make a real difference and this difference is amplified when we act together. I recently took part in the Carbon Literacy training funded by the Caritas Fund – it was sobering hearing the details of the damage our actions have caused, but it also taught me how I can measure and improve my carbon footprint. Everyone is different, so knowing what parts of your life have the greatest impact allows us to focus our efforts effectively. This is something that we will be demonstrating in the “Seeds of Hope” webinar on 8th March – do join us.

It is also important to experience and take joy in nature. People love watching Sir David Attenborough's programmes on the wonder of the natural world, but how much of that joy is hearing the awe in Sir David's voice and sharing it? If we love nature, then we are more likely to want to fight to save it – so take time to venture out and consciously use all your senses to experience the wonder of nature, to notice it and share it with others. This is the first important step towards living more simply; after this, getting into the mindset whereby we pause and consider the impact of all the decisions we make in life becomes a little easier.

*“To hope in the biblical context does not mean to remain still and silent,
but to cry out and to struggle actively for a new life in the midst of difficulties. We are
called to worship and serve God as both Creator and Redeemer.*

*The two go together just as the harvested bread and wine and the divinely made
Eucharist go together at Mass.*

*“Look upon us, O God, Creator
and ruler of all things... that we may feel the working of your mercy...”
says our Opening Prayer at Mass.*

Creation and redemption hand in hand.

*There are global challenges in caring for creation. Nations must act together. That is
not an excuse though for us not to take practical actions here and now in our locality.*

***Virtue is doing right because it is right,
regardless of the actions of others.”***

- Excerpt from Bishop Stephen Wright, pastoral letter





FUTURE EVENTS

March 8, 2025 - Seeds of Hope Webinar

- If you want to know more about the work of DEG and all other updates on this newsletter, the webinar is a perfect opportunity to be involved!
- To participate, please email chrisj.myers57@gmail.com for more information and the Zoom link.

May 24, 2025 - Laudato Si' Mass at St Mary's Cathedral

- The mass at 10.00 am is to celebrate and mark the 10th year anniversary of Pope Francis's encyclical document, Laudato Si'
- Mass will be presided over by Bishop Stephen Wright.

GOOD NEWS

Bishop Stephen and the Trustees agree to endorse the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty is not an organisation, it's an idea — one backed by a growing global network of governments, civil society organisations, academics, scientists, youth activists, health professionals, faith institutions, Indigenous peoples and hundreds of thousands of other citizens globally. The idea is to build momentum globally to foster cooperation to accelerate a transition to renewable energy for everyone.

Individuals are encouraged to add their own voices to more than a million others in signing and to encourage any organisations they have influence on to sign up too. Find out more on the website: <https://fossilfuel treaty.org/>

For more information regarding articles of the newsletter and DEG events, please visit the DEG webpage.



PILGRIMS OF HOPE

By Diogo M de Souza Montiero
Parishioner at St. Charles de
Borromeo, Gosforth and DEG
member

Pilgrims of Hope

We are living in troubled times. Sometimes I feel I am surrounded by conflict at home and in the office. Divisions and extreme views prevail in our societies. We seem to have forgotten the art of compromise and of true empathy. But despite all the darkness there are sheds of light. I look around in our communities and do see decent, generous and good people. We Christians have just celebrated the birth of our Savior. Catholics are celebrating the Jubilee with the motto Pilgrims of Hope.

What does it mean to be Pilgrims of Hope? It is true that our lives are often compared to a pilgrimage, and we hope that in the end we will meet Jesus and Lord our Father. But can't (or shouldn't) we Catholics, that are called to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, bring hope to this troubled world? What can each of us, in our families, workplaces and communities, do to bring hope to those around us?

If we take a minute and reflect, I think we can do a lot and truly make a difference. We can start with simple gestures of kindness; maybe reach out to someone we know has been struggling. We can also do our bit to protect our Common Home, by being more conscious of say the energy we use or the products we buy. In the spirit of the Pope Francis, Laudate Si', we can take this year to start our journey to a true ecological conversion, where we assume we are part of Creation and need to learn how to protect it. We can start by becoming aware of our actions, asking ourselves if we are helping or hindering Creation. Then, we can start our Journey in Hope to become part of the solution, in our homes, workplaces and communities. Shall we take the challenge and start a Pilgrimage of Hope for a better world?

Diogo M. de Souza Monteiro

Parishioner at St. Charles de Borromeo, Gosforth and Member of Hexham and Newcastle Diocese Environmental Group