



How can we follow the radical and counter cultural teachings of Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context? How do we follow God's command to 'do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God'?

As a church we believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is more relevant than ever today, and continues to bring a message of hope and good news as much for God's earth as for its peoples. As disciples of Jesus Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we recognize that a fundamental, non-negotiable part of living out faith today is to have a passionate concern for God's creation and for the healing of the planet.

We are on a journey as a church, recognizing God's infinite goodness and blessing in gifting us with such a beautiful planet. At the same time we are seeking to learn more about the planet and its peoples, in order to better live and shine out with the love, simplicity, peace, justice and care of the vulnerable that are supremely seen in the life of Jesus.

In order to be able to do this in a more consistent way, we opted in January 2019 to register as an Eco Church.

Eco Church is a scheme run by *A Rocha*, an ecumenical Christian conservation charity. The scheme offers a really helpful framework for assessing what we already do and what further steps we could take across all areas of our church life from its buildings and land, to its community engagement, worship and lifestyle choices.

Here are some examples of actions we have taken:

- **Worship and teaching:** regular prayers, liturgies and sermons that reflect our commitment to a God who cares for the wellbeing of the whole planet, its animals, people, ecosystems, and our calling as Christians to partner with God. This includes opportunities for a more direct encounter with the natural world through Forest Church and other outdoor worship events.
- **Buildings:** eco cleaning products, assessment of energy use, energy efficient light bulbs, participation in Tearfund's Toilet Twinning scheme. We have commissioned a detailed energy survey and conduct an annual carbon footprint assessment. We now offset through Carbon Stewards with the aim of reducing our footprint year on year.
- **Land:** major project to encourage more wildlife into the churchyard including creating a summer meadow and installing bird boxes, bug boxes, a hedgehog house and an owl box. We run an annual 'Count on Nature' event, inviting the community to help identify as many species as possible.
- **Community and Global engagement:** Fairtrade Church status; awareness raising and prayers for overseas environmental projects; vegan options and LOAF principles where food is shared. We ran a green festival (The Great Big Green Week) in the run-up to COP26, with participation from community groups, businesses, the local school and our MP. We plan to repeat this on an annual basis.
- **Personal Lifestyle:** church funds ethically invested; LOAF and fairtrade principles encouraged; charitable giving of clothes and food to Family Support Work encouraged. Lifestyle survey to gauge areas where more guidance would help people make better choices.



Worship: Pet/Animal Welfare Service



Community: GBGW tree planting event

As a church there is a background of environmental awareness going back many years, and on registering for the Eco Church Scheme, it was encouraging to find that after only a few small steps, notably working towards Fairtrade Church status, we were able to apply for the Bronze Award in April 2019. This was followed by the much more ambitious churchyard project, with enthusiastic support and participation from within and outside the church, enabling us to reach the Eco Church Silver Award in July 2020. At the same time we gained the Animal Friendly Church Award issued by the Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals. If you would like to view our [Churchyard Management Plan](#) please click on the link.

In 2021, in the context of the ongoing COVID19 pandemic and the COP26 summit, we registered with Tearfund's Climate Emergency Toolkit and declared a climate emergency, focusing our energies on raising awareness around climate change and biodiversity loss. To this end we ran a 'Count on Nature' event in June, encouraging the wider community to help identify species in the churchyard, and 'The Great Big Green Week' in September, a green community festival, events that we plan to repeat. Both events were supported by our local MP. They also provided a fantastic opportunity to network with like-minded nature-loving people in the community, out of which a Green Drinks discussion group was formed, resulting in a new facebook group, 'Wild about Ticehurst, Flimwell and Stonegate'. We achieved our Eco Church Gold Award in January 2022, a great encouragement to do even more for nature and the environment in the years to come. If you would like to view our [Final Report submitted for the Gold Award](#), please click on the link.



Land and Community: Count on Nature event - a visit from our MP



Community: Swap Shop in the churchyard

## Join the team

Our Eco Church Working Group is a gathering of non-experts with a passion for the environment. We enjoy tea, cake and conversation - while tending the churchyard, and doing what we can to create a greener and more equal world. If you would like to take part, we would love to hear from you. You don't need to be a member of the church to join the team!

email: [pen.evans50@gmail.com](mailto:pen.evans50@gmail.com)

## Lifestyle choices

Everyone has a part to play in looking after God's creation and there is always more that we can do. Lots of small steps can add up to a big impact, so think 'what am I doing already and what more could I do?' Here are some ideas:

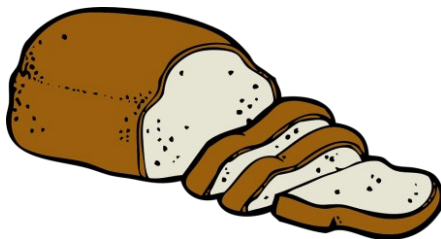
### Consider having a meat free day or even go vegan

Reducing how much meat we eat, or having just one day a week as a "meat free" day, can start to have a beneficial impact on the environment not to mention our health. Agricultural intensification (for the rearing of animals and for their feed) along with industrial overfishing are significant contributors towards climate change, loss of species and biodiversity, and the persistence of hunger and malnutrition in the human population. So eating less meat is one small step that we can take to reduce our impact on precious natural resources and it helps to support the Christian commitment to love, justice and mercy towards all God's creatures.



At St Mary's we always offer vegetarian and vegan options at our events where food plays a part.

### Consider following the LOAF principles when you make purchases



LOAF is an acronym developed by the Green Christian charity to encourage us (as far as we are able) to buy food that is

- Locally produced
- Organically grown
- Animal friendly
- Fairly traded

Locally produced – helping community and neighbour: buying food from local and regional sources means that we're supporting local farmers and businesses, and we incur less climate damaging food miles, less lorry traffic, less need for new roads and runways.

Organically grown – taking care of the earth: organic food is good for the environment and is helping to tackle climate change by using less fossil fuel energy and avoiding damaging fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides which we now know are doing much damage to our insect and bird life. Scientific research indicates that organic growing supports far more insect, plant and animal species than conventional farms.

Animal Friendly – avoiding abuse: if we eat meat we should do everything possible to ensure that they are treated humanely and are not intensively farmed or forced to endure long distance lorry transportation. Labels can be confusing – 'Farm Fresh' and 'Country Fresh' are often used to sell factory farmed products – instead look for labels marked 'Free Range' and

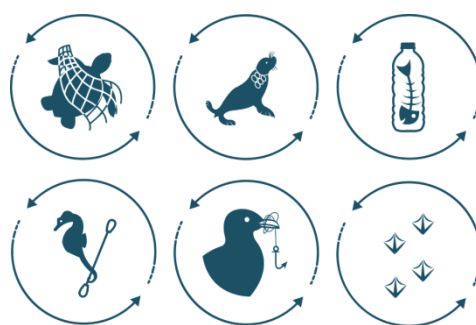
'Outdoor Reared'. The Christian concept of abundant life for the whole earth calls us to ensure that food is produced in ways that respect fullness of life for all God's creatures.

Fairly traded - creating social justice: trade needs to be both sustainable and fair. Some foods, such as bananas, citrus, cocoa, coffee and tea, cannot be produced locally. Making sure that we buy Fairtrade means that workers get a living wage, are better able to send their children to school and are equipped to work the land sustainably. Of course farmers in the UK, too, need a fair price for their produce – too often the low prices they receive don't even cover the cost of production.

Whenever we share food at St Mary's we try to follow these principles as much as possible.

### **Say no to single use plastics**

Our landfill sites are now packed with plastics which will take thousands of years to degrade, if they manage to degrade at all. Our oceans are worse, which has a direct impact on the marine wildlife and eco-systems which we rely on.



There are all sorts of imaginative ways that we can reduce our use of these types of plastics, such as using re-fill shops to stock up on dried foods, and switching to shampoo and conditioner bars, instead of plastic bottles.

At St Mary's we are working hard towards eliminating unnecessary single use plastics.

### **Create a wildlife haven**



Native UK wildlife is in decline due to the amount of natural habitat that is being lost and the use of harmful insecticides. In recent years there has been a massive decline in insect numbers. We rely on bees, for example, for pollinating a large number of crops, yet according to a recent report 17 species in the East of England have been lost with another 25 under threat.

However small your own green space is, there are many ways to encourage more wildlife - pots filled with insect-loving flowers or herbs, for example, or leaving an area of lawn to grow long in the summer to encourage more pollinating insects. Help hedgehogs too, by making a small hole in your fence to enable them to roam.

At St Mary's we are working towards making sure our green spaces are cared for with wildlife in mind. In 2019 we installed bird boxes, bug boxes, a bat box and a hedgehog house, and commissioned a plant survey. We have more recently installed an owl box. We now conduct annual surveys of plants and other creatures, and are expanding the areas we grow as summer meadow in order to encourage more wildlife.

## Useful Links

A Rocha Eco Church:

<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>

Church of England environment pages:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change>

Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals:

<https://www.aswa.org.uk/>

Green Christian:

<https://greenchristian.org.uk/>

Operation Noah:

<https://operationnoah.org/>

Caring for God's Acre:

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

Tearfund's Climate Emergency Toolkit

<https://www.climateemergencytoolkit.com/>

## Local Links

St Mary's Church Ticehurst

<https://www.facebook.com/stMarysTicehurst>

Wild about Ticehurst, Flimwell and Stonegate

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/645946750184885>