



As a church we believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings a message of hope and good news as much for God's earth as for its peoples. Wherever we are able, we try to be active in protecting, conserving and celebrating the world that God has entrusted to our care.

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 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.

Some changes we have made include assessing our energy use, making a commitment to serve and promote Fairtrade goods, using eco cleaning products and taking actions to encourage more wildlife in the churchyard. If you would like to view our [Churchyard Management Plan](#) or the comments that arose at the [Public Meeting](#) please click on the links. The steps that we have taken have enabled us to achieve both an Eco Church Bronze Award and Fairtrade status.

In addition to taking steps as a church, we would also like to encourage individuals to take steps towards making the world more sustainable. Lots of small steps could add up to a big impact on our environment, so think 'what am I doing already and what more could I do?' See some examples below under the sub-heading 'Lifestyle choices'.

### **Join the team**

Our Eco Church Working Group is made up of non-experts with a passion for the environment. There are a range of different areas that we are looking at, and so it's likely there will be something of interest to you. 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!

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## Lifestyle choices

Everyone has a part to play in looking after God's creation and there is always more that we can do. Here are some ideas:

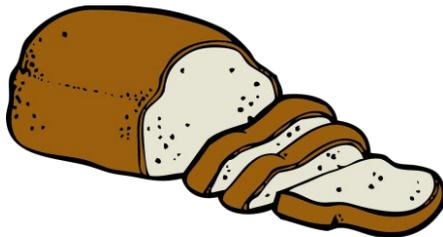
### Consider having a meat free day

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 alternatives 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

- **L**ocally produced
- **O**rganically grown
- **A**nimal friendly
- **F**airly 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. Scientists are now urging us to buy organic food to help curb catastrophic insect collapse, as 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.

If you want more information, there’s a LOAF leaflet displayed on the Eco Church noticeboard in St Mary’s Church or you can download a leaflet from the Green Christian website (see link below).

### **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.

Many people have now got used to taking their own bags to the supermarket rather than buying a new bag each time. There are lots of other ways you can reduce your use of these types of plastic. Manufacturers are increasingly offering alternatives, such as shampoo bars instead of shampoo 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. Many different types of bee are dying out (17 species in the East of England have been lost with another 25 under threat, according to a recent report). And we rely on bees for pollinating a large number of crops which we then use for food!



However small your own green space is, there are many ways to encourage more wildlife. For example you could leave some lawn to grow long in the summer to encourage more pollinating insects, and you could make a small hole in your fence to give access to hedgehogs. (There is a leaflet on the Eco Church noticeboard in St Mary's Church giving tips on how to encourage hedgehogs into your neighbourhood or download your own copy at [www.ptes.org](http://www.ptes.org) ).

At St Mary's we are working towards making sure our green spaces are cared for with wildlife in mind. We have installed bird boxes, bug boxes, a bat box and a hedgehog house. In July 2019, we commissioned an ecologist to conduct a plant survey to find out what was growing in the churchyard – she found 93 different species. We have drawn up a Churchyard Management Plan to map out how best to conserve and enhance what we have. The final version was drawn up following a public meeting in November 2019 (links to access the Plan and Meeting Notes are on the first page of this article). If you have any further comments or if you would like to register an interest in volunteering in the churchyard please let me know at the email address on the first page of this article.

## Useful Links

*A Rocha* Eco Church website

[www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk](http://www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk)

Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals

[www.aswa.org.uk](http://www.aswa.org.uk)

Green Christian

[www.greenchristian.org.uk](http://www.greenchristian.org.uk)