

SILVER FOR OUR ECO-CONGREGATION

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Alas, for now the congregation is not able to flock together and the only sound in the cathedral most of the time is but a distant echo of our voices. But we are still a virtual eco-congregation, and we have rather unexpectedly won a silver award when we had only applied for a bronze. This implies that there was a race in which we came second, but no, it means that our application met a standard set by Eco-Congregation Scotland and that we had made sufficient progress over the short time we have been working towards the concept to impress the judges. We owe much to Anne Backhouse and Provost John for their leadership.

The emphasis of the application was on climate change and how far we collectively can go to eliminate our effects on the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. We all know how serious this problem is and how it will impact especially on our children and grandchildren. Last year carbon dioxide in the atmosphere reached a level one third higher than it was at the start of the Industrial age and it has continued to increase even over the pandemic. The pandemic itself owes its origins and its ubiquity to mankind's abuse of nature, including wet animal markets in China and international air travel. We are also reminded daily of the effects of climate change, from wildfires in Australia and USA, floods in England, and record storms everywhere. And the rate of change is increasing. Each fire increases carbon dioxide levels *and* kills the trees that should reduce them, each degree of temperature change melts more ice and sea levels rise faster while reflection of heat back is reduced. Methane is released from previously frozen tundra. People can't grow their crops for want of water and have to migrate. These feed-back mechanisms lead eventually to irreversible baking of the planet. We do not have long to put the brakes on.

These facts induce fatalism, but fatalism prevents positive action. Positive action is what eco-congregations are about. While every human can and must do a bit, we can do much more collectively, and as members of the congregation we can have an influence on each other and on people elsewhere. So, you may reasonably be wondering what we in St Mary's have done to merit this award. Already of course we were involved in Fair Trade and One World Shop, but the judges commented on our work to encourage divestment in fossil fuels and investigating means of reducing the Cathedral's carbon footprint, primarily from heating. You will have noticed the emphasis on care for Creation in the services and the personal eco-tips we have been posting. Work under Jo Hargreaves's direction is underway to increase natural wildlife in the grassy areas and this is being combined with learning among the children. Apple trees have been planted also and plans are underway for redesign of the south lawn taking ecological issues into consideration. Part of the objective is to spread the word and share experience, so joint meetings with other organisations are to take place.

Perhaps the most important part of this is what we all do personally as Christians. Our own example to others acts like a good virus. We all now know about the infamous R number, the number of people infected from a single source in a non-immune population. Looked at this way, the influence of only one person can be great, passing the message of an ecologically-aware life on to hundreds and thousands by this epidemic effect. Not only can we make our own contribution by living a greener life, but we can show others why and how we are doing it. And I have a tip for those of you who have savings. Green investments have lately done much better than traditional ones and would allow you to give more to St Mary's for its good work! Silver is good, but let's go for gold.