



Eco-Congregation Mid Argyll Network

REPORT OF THE REGIONAL GATHERING Lochgilphead Baptist Centre 30th May 2015

Introduction

This was the fourth in a series of Regional Gatherings being held in Network areas from where it is hard for people to travel to national meetings, which are usually held in the Central Belt. The aim of the day was to help support and develop caring for creation work in the area's congregations. It was also an opportunity for ECS to consult and listen to the views of the network in regard to how to best support development locally. This was Eco-Congregation coming to the Argyll!

Attendance

16 people attended the Regional Gathering, representing congregations from Ardchattan, and Oban to Ardrishaig and Inveraray. There was a mix of congregations represented, bringing a range of experience: from second award winners to those that are just considering registering as an eco-congregation.



Making the Link

Rev Trevor Jamison

Following a warm welcome from Jean Hodgson, the Mid Argyll Network Co-ordinator, Trevor gave a talk on resources for Christian Worship that is grounded in creation, entitled, "The Theatre of God's Glory". He explained the "Why, When, Where and How" of Green Worship.

Included in the "Whys" were:

- The earth is the Lord's (Psalm 24)
- He loves it ... so much "For God so loved the WORLD that he gave his only Son (John 3: 16)
- We are grateful
- We love God
- And our neighbour
- We are part of creation

We can express worship grounded in creation in many ways and theologians representing very different backgrounds, from Calvin to the present Pope Francis, encourage us to do so.

Trevor reminded us that we are worshipping God and not creation itself and among the “Whens” were special occasions, at different seasons of the year and through special actions in our churches, like floral arrangements, it can be at any time!

We can obviously have worship focussed on creation both inside and especially outside our church buildings and our worship can be through:

- Praying
- Singing
- Preaching
- At the table

Trevor then led us in prayer and song, including a new song by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette sung to the tune of Beethoven’s Ode to Joy, see www.carolynshymns.com/.

For preaching, favoured texts include Romans 8, Colossians 1, Genesis 1 and 2, Psalms and a suggestion to follow the lectionary. For some, it might also be appropriate to consider the way in which the liturgy is used at the table and with the elements: are they organic, fairly traded, locally produced?

Trevor’s final thought was “Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!” Psalm 150: 6



Growing Eco-Congregation in Scotland*

Margaret Warnock

This was an overview of the movement showing how it had grown from just 4 pilot congregations in 2000 to more than 330 now registered. There are 11 registered eco-congregations in the Mid Argyll area and contact with a further 3 congregations. Amongst the registered congregations there are also 3 award winners. However, many more congregations and parishes than those registered are probably active in caring for creation work.

Eco-Congregation Scotland offers:

- Resources: web based, written resources, people
- Support: web site: www.ecocongregationscotland.org, newsletters, links to other organisations, support and advice
- An Award scheme to affirm, encourage and witness
- Local Networks to help churches: work together on bigger, joint projects, exchange ideas, access information, advice and grants
- An Environmental Chaplain to help understanding of the spiritual and theological reasons why we should care for creation

Margaret then showed examples of congregations from across Scotland that are taking action in the three core areas of the Eco-Congregation programme: Spiritual, Practical and Community. There are also church based environmental programmes in many different countries throughout Europe and beyond and some, such as Hungary, have adopted the Eco-Congregation model.

Lastly, Margaret shared ECS’s mission (see also <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/about-us/about/>):

- In prayer, worship and conversation we discover what it means to care for God’s creation
- We put that care into action individually, locally, nationally and globally, desiring to live justly in a transformed world

- We commit ourselves to campaigning on urgent threats to the web of life in our vulnerable world



Open Forum

Discussion then focussed on three areas:

1. The Award System: the purpose of the Award, how to apply and gain an Award, criteria and timing. Full information about all these items can be found at: <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/award/>

2. A New Network for North Argyll? With congregations being so scattered in this part of Argyll and the distances that have to be travelled in order to meet up as a network, it was decided that it would be beneficial to the growth and development of the Eco-Congregation movement in the area to pilot a new network grouping amongst the congregations in the North Argyll area. (See also **Growing ECS in Mid Argyll – and the wider area**).

3. Sustainable Church Buildings many congregations struggle with maintaining and using old buildings that are difficult to heat and light efficiently. Churches in the Cowal area are currently being assisted with tackling these challenges through a project which looks at how these buildings can be made more sustainable and so encourage greater use and witness to their communities. Scott Wham the young architect who wrote the ECS resource about “Greening Church Buildings” (see <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Greening-Church-Buildings.pdf>) is working with the Church of Scotland on this project, which is just moving into the implementation stage. He is available to come and talk to networks about lessons learned in Cowal.

Community links with Environmental projects (1)

Peter Creech

Blarbuie Woodland Project

This project is a mental health charity and has been set up in the woodland area between two hospitals. The woodlands were planted around 150 years ago and the charity encourages the sustainable and artistic use of the woods. They train people in woodland skills and work with mental health service users, community payback and Job Centre Plus schemes.

Logs, bedding plants and salad crops are sold to generate income. All food is grown organically and



polytunnels have been established on a reclaimed bowling green area. All ability access walking trails run through area. There are 3 part-time staff and fifteen trainees and the project runs on a budget of £80,000 a year.

There are various opportunities for working together with churches, including:

- Enjoying the woodlands as a place to relax, regenerate and learn.
- Getting involved as volunteers and helping with path-work, tree planting, maintenance, crafts, public events and guided walks. Walk Leaders are provided with training by Paths for All.
- Blarbuie are in discussion with Ardrishaig Parish Church about providing support for developing their church garden and grounds.

With so much of Argyll being covered in woodland and forest there will be other local opportunities to get involved and support practical community projects, such as Blarbuie. See:

<http://www.communitywoods.org/>

<http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

<http://www.reforestingscotland.org/projects/>

Community links with Environmental projects (2)

Liz Craven

Lochgilphead Campus

Lochgilphead Campus has been an Eco School since 2007 and from then until 2010, they built up a number of different projects within the school grounds, mainly focussed on growing fruit and vegetables. Various classes and groups within the school undertake different projects. The subsequent move to a new site, with pre-school, primary and High School forming the new Campus, has enabled the work to progress in many ways.



They now grow rhubarb and have a range of fruit trees (Scottish varieties), raised beds and a polytunnel for veg growing. Plants are sold to generate income and they use a variety of fun themes to encourage participation eg growing all the ingredients for Christmas dinner or an afternoon tea and a "Chilli Challenge". Fruit and veg are also supplied to the school canteen.

They also work with community groups including: Ardfenaig Dementia Unit Primrose Garden and Ardrishaig Church Community Garden, where opportunities for local people to use space to grow their own produce will be developed.

They also have a useful risk assessment for working with children on composting projects (contact Liz on 01546 602598).

Community links with Environmental projects (3)

This was an opportunity to hear from all the eco-congregations represented at the Gathering, to share Eco- Congregation journeys, examples of community projects – and learn from each other.

Christ Church Episcopal Church, Lochgilphead are not yet registered but have church grounds that they are beginning to try manage better for wildlife. They have an area of glebe land, some of which is marshland, which has been surveyed and found to have some interesting flora and fauna. However, their graveyard is becoming overgrown due to the difficulty of finding someone to mow the area.

Kilmartin, Glassary and Ford have been registered as an eco-congregation for four years. They are a linked charge, with services in rotating between the different churches. Some people travel between all services and others just attend the church in their own locality. The original group who promoted eco work in the church have mostly dropped out for various reasons but a couple of people keep things going with a Fair Trade goods, particularly at Christmas and themed services.

Ardrishaig started out with a simple action of collecting batteries for recycling (before this service became available through shops that sell them). They participate in an Annual Beach Clean and have a garden, where fruit trees and wild flowers are grown.

Every year they also have a “Green Tea” or now a “Green Barbecue”, when, as much as possible, food served is local, organic, animal-friendly and fair trade. Last year this was followed by an evening service, led by Trevor, which included Communion. A themed coffee morning in January with a stall for unwanted gifts is well supported and, together with a book (reuse) stall at the local Gala Day, serves to promote the eco work of the church.

Netherlorn became an eco-congregation two years ago and is made up of three parishes with five buildings. Their minister is supportive but very busy and they have a joint kirk session, which meets twice a year. It has been decided to “pilot” eco-congregation with the church at Kilbrandon and progress was described as “purposely slow” as they seek to involve the whole congregation. The Churches Check Up has been split between the Session and the Board and they are working to put together their Action Plan by the end of May. They are lacking a project which will link to the local community and although they have a small garden, there are problems in involving others as the site slopes down to a busy main road. However, there is a local Beach Clean, organised by a commercial company, which might provide an opportunity for the link.

St John the Divine, Oban has recently registered. They have large, old and draughty buildings and are about to carry out major renovations, with advice from an architect and others re improving energy efficiency etc. The church does not have any land but they do their best with flower boxes etc.

All Saints, Inveraray is linked with Christ Church in Lochgilphead and is busy with visitors. They also have land around the church and have Inveraray Primary School next door, which is a top Eco School in Argyll and Bute. The church has a brand new heating system.

Ardchattan joined ECS to show solidarity with our aims, add their voice and be part of making us a stronger voice. They have one or two smaller projects, are hosting the baton and Lynda would like to accompany it to Paris!

Growing ECS in Mid Argyll – and the wider area

In the final session participants discussed what they would like to get from the Network and how to make this happen:

The main topic for discussion was establishing a new network for congregations in the North Argyll area. It was agreed that:

- Brien Dickey (Netherlorn), Liz McNelly (St John the Divine) and Lynda Mitchell (Ardchattan) will act as an informal co-ordinating group to help establish the network
- We will pilot the new network with an initial meeting on **Monday 21st September**, hosted by St John the Divine in Oban
- There will be a need to involve other congregations in the new network area, including those that have been involved before, such as Kilmore and Oban Church of Scotland. This may also be helped by Netherlorn's minister currently being Moderator of the Presbytery
- The existing ECS contacts will be divided between the two networks, according to their locations. Margaret will send a list to both Jean Hodgson (for Mid Argyll) and to the co-ordinating group (for North Argyll), so that the split can be agreed.

For the existing Mid Argyll network the next meeting was planned for **Thursday 1st October** in Ardrishaig Parish Church. The topic of looking at ethical boycotts and, in particular, the question of: "Should the Church invest in fossil fuel companies?" Adrian Shaw (the Church of Scotland's Climate Change Officer) is currently exploring this question with networks across the country and would welcome feedback.

Lastly, there was discussion of how to make best use of the Baton as it travelled through Argyll, (see <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/get-involved/events/baton-relay/>) including visits to Ardrishaig Church, Lochgilphead Campus, Presbytery, South Argyll Presbyterial Guild Council Summer Rally, Ardchattan Parish and St John's Cathedral in Oban

The meeting closed with thanks to all those involved in organising the day, in particular Jean Hodgson and her team from Ardrishaig.

MW 150610

APPENDIX 1

List of Participants

Catriona Beel All Saints, Inveraray

Lynda Mitchell Ardchattan Parish Church
Morag Allward

David Carruthers Ardrishaig Parish Church
Jean Hodgson
Fiona MacFarlane
Caroline MacLean
Mary Stirling
Anne Watson

Peter Creech	Blarbuie Woodland Project
Grace MacLeod	
Brian Bleach	Christ Church, Lochgilphead
Brien Dickey	Kilbrandon, Netherlorn Churches
Corrine Mills	Kilmartin, Glassary and Ford Parish Church
Liz Craven	Lochgilphead Campus
Ann Devine	
Nicki McNelly	St John's Cathedral, Oban
Trevor Jamison	Eco-Congregation Scotland
Margaret Warnock	

APPENDIX 2

Evaluation

There were 8 evaluation sheets returned. One of these was for the morning sessions only.

QUESTION	EXCELLENT	GOOD	OK	BLANK
Pre meeting information. Publicity.	4	2	2	
Information given	5	3		
Directions to venue	4	4		
Venue suitability/comfort.	5	3		
Sessions: Making the link.	4	4		
Growing Eco Congregations.	3	3		
Blarbuie Woodlands Project	4	2	1	1
Lochgilphead Campus Eco School	5	2		1
Growing Eco Congregations/Open discussion	4	2	1	1

Two people made additional comments:

- Both Community Projects labelled as “Very interesting”
- Detailed comments as follows:-

 1. Making the link. Good overall both about ECS, and other congregations’ activities.
 2. Growing Eco Congregations. Promising ideas for possible future meetings.
 3. Blarbuie. Very informative and interesting.
 4. Eco Schools. What a hidden resource! Very impressive achievements.
 5. Growing ECS in Mid Argyll. Valued the discussion on what everyone is doing. It is important for congregations to support ECS as a pressure group re Paris conference.