

## SS John Fisher & Thomas More church, Burley in Wharfedale – our Tree of Life project

### Laudato Si'

On 24th May 2015 Pope Francis signed his landmark encyclical *Laudato Si': On the Care of Our Common Home*, it can be read [here](#). A whole year of prayer and special intentions begun in autumn 2019, this was a great encouragement for us to do something in our parish family. It asked us to think about the things we value most, how could we start to change what we do in our lives at home and in the parish to better protect and enhance our beautiful, but fragile world.

### How did it all begin in the parish?

At the end of 2019 we asked parishioners how we would respond to Pope Francis' message in *Laudato Si'*. We had an amazing 383 suggestions, these were summarised on new posters displayed in the church foyer. We called our parish project the **Tree of Life**, its 3 main themes are:

- work with nature
- reuse, reduce, recycle, renew
- campaigning

We are working with the diocese's Justice & Peace climate change group to promote and share ideas, see <https://www.leedsjp.org.uk/campaigns/climate-change/> for lots of information.

## 2 Work with Nature team



Frances McDermott is co-ordinating the Work with Nature team, this is what Frances suggested we could do:

"I have a passion for, and interest in nature. In particular how growing plants, flowers, herbs, fruit and vegetables in a community setting can be harnessed and channelled into a respect and love for all living things - plants and animals.

"In carrying out this project, it would be great to see people of all ages coming together, contributing whatever they can, in order to make our church grounds more beautiful, to lift spirits and encourage friendships; and at the same time put into practice some of the things people of the parish have written on their Tree of Life leaves a few months ago.

"The aims of the group project would be to encourage growth and development of wildflowers, insects such as bees, worms, and plants for food; as well as employing the principles of sustainable water collection, responsible waste disposal, re-using and re-cycling items such as plant pots.

"An initial meeting or two will be proposed for those interested in coming along to share ideas (and a chat along with cake!) However this will now have to be after we are able to meet and use the church again.

The team had a meeting at the end of June 2020 outside the church to look and share ideas of what we could do to enhance the church gardens. Our plans and ideas included building:

- Bird and bat boxes for the back garden
- Raised beds for growing vegetables and herbs
- Water butts for collecting and re-using rainwater
- Raised beds and information at the front of the church about insect friendly flowering plants and their benefits to wildlife in general
- A compost site in the back garden

## Church Gardens



We started by digging up unwanted, overgrown shrubs at the front of the church, but kept those which are attractive to wildlife, especially insects and birds. We then broke up the heavy soil and added some grit and composted manure to improve its condition.

The aim is to improve our appreciation of nature and encourage wildlife: birds, insects and other animals to thrive among us.



The team has been planting to brighten up the front of the church and provide some evergreen shrubs which will provide beautiful colours in leaves and flowers throughout the winter and into spring. We had some good suggestions from the team about what we could plant to provide colour, scent and attractive to birds & insects. We discussed this with a local garden centre and bought 12 shrubs and over 150 bulbs.

We hope you enjoy seeing the front bed of the church, and the raised bed in front of the hall, evolve with time.



All finished!

## Raised beds



We have a great new raised bed on the gravelled area just outside the church hall. Children (and grown-ups too!) have grown insect friendly flowers this year, they have brought them along with a trowel and a small container of water to plant them in the planter. We have started to build-up a wildlife haven for insects and birds.

### Water butt



Frances and Ian have installed and attached a new water butt to the drainpipe at the side of the church hall. This will provide rainwater to water plants in the garden.

### Wildlife boxes

Loraine sent some great details about making wildlife boxes. This summer we helped our wildlife just that little bit more by building wildlife boxes. We started with bird boxes and bat boxes, which have been certified as 'suitable for novices'. We had a fun Saturday event to make some for our gardens and the church garden, here are some great photos of the day.





Inspired by our project, Mary's husband built 4 bird boxes from an old wooden pallet which apparently is the perfect size for bird boxes. We found a factsheet from RSPB – click [here](#) for how to do this!

### Sunflower seedlings

Our parish children took sunflower seedlings to grow in their gardens. Frances produced some lovely posters with more information about sunflowers, you can find them [here](#). Frances said, "I would even encourage the sunflower grower to give the plant a name, or name it after someone for whom you are growing it, and therefore encourage your love and care of that person, as well as for the plant. Sharing pictures and messages about it might just bring a smile or just some contact between people who are separated at the moment."

The seedlings did very well, here are some photos of the children with their plants. In June we just needed the sun to see their beauty!



### What's next?

We found some really good, green ideas [here](#) for us to use during Advent 2020.

In 2021 we want to help our parish children build some bug hotels like these:



We plan to apply to CAFOD's *Livesimply* award, this is an opportunity to respond to Pope Francis' invitation to "work with generosity and tenderness in protecting this world which God has entrusted to us". The award is given to communities who can show how they have been living:

- simply
- in solidarity with people in poverty, and
- sustainably with creation