

St Mary's Guildford

Eco Church Silver Award

St Mary's
Church



It was an early Christmas gift to hear that St Mary's Guildford (shared church of Anglicans and Methodists) was awarded a Silver Eco Church Award by A Rocha UK.

To apply for an award, it was necessary to go through a survey together and answer questions on how we were doing in several different areas (Buildings, Land, Worship and Teaching, Lifestyle and Community/Global Engagement).

In some ways, our journey to apply for an Ecochurch award was quick once it was decided upon. Our Ecogroup formed in October and we were able to smoothly run through the survey and answer most of the questions in one sitting. We also made a list of things to work on and started to immediately implement some easy but hopefully impactful things – namely, adding in some eco news and sharing climate events in our newsletter as well as sharing eco tips to encourage church members in their personal care for the environment. This coincided with the time of COP26 so naturally, there were lots of high profile climate-related issues to talk about and raise awareness of. Our survey was submitted in November and we then had to provide additional information on some categories in December in response to queries on our application. Our scores and answers to the questions merited a Silver Award.

In other ways, our journey to becoming a Silver Ecochurch has been part of a longer process of preparation and readiness to be at the point of applying. I am familiar with the Ecochurch process, having been involved in the last few churches I was in. Our shared church has had the strong eco-leadership example of Holy Trinity Church and their recent Gold Ecochurch status to follow, who were able to provide guidance in our application, support for getting an ecochurch group going, and did a lot of the groundwork within the parish. We share a parish office and buildings with Holy Trinity and several decisions over recycling facilities, land and energy use had already been made. We also share in some of the teaching, worship and mission, so references to creation and the environment already featured in many aspects of church life. Parish walks and churchyard tidy ups at Holy Trinity are open to all. One of our Ecogroup had participated in a survey of nature in the churchyard a few years ago, which we were able to submit as evidence of engagement in the Land Category. I was involved in climate justice campaigns for COP26 from my participation in the Young Christian Climate Network. One big investment for the environment was the refurbishment project of the church building which took place a few years ago. The addition of underfloor heating as well as changes made to the doors has contributed significantly to our building saving energy.

The pandemic has also played a part in eco-church considerations. As usual church activities were suspended or moved online, this meant the usage of the building changed, so we had to estimate what yearly bills would come to. It has sometimes been necessary to use Covid-safe hospitality (unfortunately meaning using more disposable items for a time).

Engagement with the community and church has had to adapt. St Mary's was chosen to host the Garden of Hope during the summer months of 2020 and many local people were able to make use of our garden space.

Whilst working towards and obtaining an Ecochurch award is good and commendable as it provides a good measure of how a church is doing in different areas related to the environment, things don't stop there. What matters most is continuing our efforts to care for the environment and climate in our personal lives and corporate life as a church. We already have some plans to keep improving our witness and work in areas requiring more attention, whilst hoping to sustain our efforts in what we're doing well.

Over the past few years, the climate emergency has become very apparent and is a priority for many, especially young people. Care for the planet is an integral part of mission for all Christians, as it shows love for God and neighbour and is one way to live out the Gospel message. Churches have a role to ensure that they are as eco-friendly as possible and encourage others inside and outside the Church to act for climate justice and live more sustainably. It is good to be part of the Ecochurch network as one way of visibly playing our part in this area and knowing we are not alone in our journey and mission, but alongside others.

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