

ENGAGING WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY



COMMUNITY & GLOBAL

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WHY?

Engaging with the local community is an opportunity to bring our faith in Jesus and our passion to care for God's creation into the public square, being salt and light and helping others see what it means to be Christian.

HOW?

We suggest that you try to find out what is already going on locally which you may be able to join in with. Think about what would make the most impact in your community and what is achievable in your context. There are also a number of national or global initiatives which aim to have a local focus which you can join in with.

Some actions might be one-off events which members of the church can undertake in their own time, whilst others could be a reason to come together as a church and promote activities more widely in the community, or you could join in with established or new community actions.

HOST AN EVENT OR RUN AN INITIATIVE

It can be useful to link the action to other church or community events to help raise the profile locally; perhaps a 'Carbon Fast' during the season of Lent, or take part with local schools in an initiative like 'Plastic Free July': <https://www.plasticfreejuly.org/>

You may wish to arrange a 'Walk to Church Sunday' to coincide with the national 'Big Pedal' week in April: <https://bigpedal.org.uk/> or during 'Walk to School Week' in May: <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/products-and-services/projects/walk-to-school-week>

A simple, easy to join in, annual international event, which you could use as a focus is 'Earth Hour' – a WWF initiative. At 8.30pm on the last Saturday in March WWF, Earth Hour invites you to turn off your lights. Earth Hour is one of the world's largest grassroots movements for the environment, with millions of people in more than 180 countries, switching off their lights to show support for our planet. They have resources such as videos and statistics to share with your church: <https://www.earthhour.org/>



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Churches are well placed to host environmental awareness-raising events such as green fairs, film evenings or opportunities to engage with local leaders. In one of the case studies a church-run event has been the focus for subsequent community environmental activity.

Whatever you decide to do, be sure to promote the events in good time to maximise involvement from both the church and the community.

FIND YOUR NEAREST TRANSITION INITIATIVE (FORMERLY TRANSITION TOWN)

The Transition Towns movement was established in 2005. Its aim is to create a 'healthy human culture': to meet people's needs for community, livelihoods and fun. Focussed on helping communities face the big challenges, starting locally, they encourage communities to create a model which makes their town a better place to live. Three aims of the transition movement are:

- Helping communities to work together to address the big challenges they face.
- Re-localisation; aiming to meet core needs such as food, energy and building materials locally. Projects often include community allotments or renewable energy generation.
- Regenerative development; creating employment opportunities for all, relying less on fossil fuels and other scarce resources:

<https://transitionnetwork.org/transition-near-me/>

JOIN A CONSERVATION GROUP

In your area, there may be local conservation groups, local branches of national organisations and perhaps also, reserves or sites managed by national environmental organisations. Do research into which charities are working locally. Here are a few ideas to start you off:

The Wildlife Trust and The Conservation Volunteers are both national charities aiming to bring people, green spaces and nature closer together, whilst protecting the environment for future generations. They also have a wide network of local groups so you may well be able to find one near you.



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Wildlife Trusts: It was in May 1912 – a month after the Titanic sank – that Charles Rothschild held a meeting to discuss his radical idea about saving places for nature. This ultimately led to the formation of the Wildlife Trusts, which aim to save wildlife and wild places, bring people closer to nature and combat the climate and nature emergency. You can find your local group here: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-trusts>

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV): TCV undertakes a range of activities in both urban and rural areas, from planting trees and wildflower meadows, to building stiles, clearing footpaths or creating new food-growing projects. Perhaps some church members might like to volunteer individually or together? <https://www.tcv.org.uk/communities/find-community-group/>

TCV also run 'Green Gym' sessions which have an emphasis on health and fitness as people participate in conservation projects. They sound like a fun way of making friends and keeping fit! <https://www.tcv.org.uk/greengym/>

CHARITIES WITH AN ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS, WHICH HAVE SITES OR RESERVES WHERE YOU MAY BE ABLE TO VOLUNTEER INCLUDE:

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT): Founded by Sir Peter Scott, an early conservation pioneer, the WWT works with communities around the world which depend on wetlands. Currently (in 2021), they have ten reserves across the United Kingdom, where volunteers can undertake practical conservation work or other valuable tasks: <https://www.wwt.org.uk/join-and-support/volunteering/volunteering-opportunities/>

The National Trust: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/find-an-opportunity>

The National Trust for Scotland: <https://www.nts.org.uk/volunteering-jobs>

The Woodland Trust: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/support-us/act/volunteer-with-us/opportunities/>



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CHARITIES FOCUSING ON SUPPORTING A SPECIFIC SPECIES INCLUDE:

BTO: <https://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/take-part-project/volunteering>

RSPB: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering-fundraising/volunteer/>

Bat Conservation Trust: <https://www.bats.org.uk/support-bats/volunteer>

Butterfly Conservation: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/get-involved/volunteering>

DISCOVER YOUR LOCAL FRIENDS OF THE EARTH GROUP

Friends of the Earth (FOE) is an international community dedicated to protecting the natural world and the wellbeing of everyone in it. The main focus of FOE is campaigning on issues of climate, nature, system change and consumption. FOE say they are the largest grassroots environmental campaigning community in the UK. You can find your local group here: <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/take-action/our-local-groups>



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CASE STUDIES

Lewes is an historic town with a long history of being radical, and not just famous for rolling burning tar barrels down the High Street on 5th November! It also is very focused on local sustainability. Trinity Church, Lewes has been at the heart of many of its sustainability projects. See the separate resource.

A film screening started eco-friendly community actions: In October 2019, Desford Free Church, in a small village in Leicestershire, held a showing of Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power* to launch the church's climate change action group – '*Green Lives, Green Planet*'. About 20 local people came along, so the church set up a programme of meetings. At the first they introduced a 'lifestyle audit', and at the second held an information brainstorm to find out what would help the community to lead sustainable lifestyles. This brainstorm led to the creation of a website with local eco-friendly tips and contacts: www.greenlivesgreenplanet.org. A regular 'Freebie table' coffee morning was also launched to which people still bring along anything they no longer need and take anything they could use. Working in partnership with a small local company, Next Gen, comes to the coffee mornings to offer refillable eco products and other eco-friendly products for sale.

Coffee morning which became the catalyst for a town-wide eco-action group: St Mary's Church, East Grinstead, organised a 'Show the Love' coffee morning. Their MP was unable to come but the local councillors participated. The congregation and the general public were invited to talk to the councillors about how to make East Grinstead 'cleaner and greener'. This has resulted in the setting up of a town action group. This group organises litter picks around East Grinstead, is building a community orchard, and is also involved in a community garden, both of which are within the church's parish.