

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/5-november/features/features/green-church-showcase-spreadsheet-theology>

CHURCH TIMES

H
Y
M
N
S
Ancient
& Modern

Green Church Showcase: Spreadsheet theology



by [Tim Wyatt](#) 05 November 2021

On receiving a silver award, one church, in Dorking, decided to go for gold



Creation Care

Encouraging households
to care for God's world

MUCH of the time embarking on a “green” church project involves large sums of money, years of work, and shiny new technology. But the congregation of St Paul’s, Dorking, have been able to change lives with little more than an Excel spreadsheet and a handful of unpaid volunteers.

It all began when the church reached the silver level of the environmental charity A Rocha’s [Eco Church](#) scheme. The church itself had been making changes in all areas of its life to become more [environmentally conscious](#) and reduce its footprint on creation, but the then Vicar — and now Bishop of Horsham, the Rt Revd Ruth Bushyager — felt compelled to include the congregation in the journey.

“Obviously, there’s one church, which uses a certain amount of electricity or gas each year,” the eco officer at St Paul’s, Annabelle South, explains. “But, if there’s 300 households making those changes, we could really amplify it.” The answer was to invent their own personalised version of the scheme, which individual households could work through to gain a de facto “Eco Congregant” status, comparable to the Eco Church and Eco Diocese programmes long since under way.

While many websites exist to help individuals to compute their carbon emissions or offer tips on reducing consumption, there was no single tool provide a plan to enable them to reflect, step by step in their lives, God's care for his creation.

So, St Paul's decided to make their own. Beginning with a dozen households in the summer of 2019, a basic Excel spreadsheet was created, which allowed users to be challenged on different areas of their lives, and which helped them to reduce their footprint gradually, switch to greener alternatives, and build care for creation into everyday life. "We also wanted it to be explicitly faith-based; we've included prayer and worship as an area in there as well," Ms South says.

The other areas covered are home, garden, travel, food, possessions, and community and global engagement. As each household completed the survey, they would work towards bronze-, silver-, and then gold-level awards, depending on how far-reaching the changes were.

THE project received a boost when an anonymous donation was made, allowing Ms South to hire a web developer to convert the spreadsheet into a more user-friendly website, and open the scheme up to Christians from around the UK. Now, more than 700 households, from 70 different churches, have signed up to work through the scheme.

Ms South has herself taken part, and found her family switching to vegan meals on weekdays as a result, although, she says, the most lasting change was to her prayer life. "I wasn't routinely praying enough about it — for caring for creation, about [climate change](#), about wildlife, and about the organisations that work to protect God's wonderful [creation](#)."

While anybody can sign up their household to the website, it is unreservedly Christian in its emphasis, and links to initiatives from Tearfund and A Rocha, as well as challenging people on their worship and prayer habits, she says. "We do this because we believe God's creation has value because it's made by a wonderful Creator."

There was some initial confusion in St Paul's about why the church was investing in the scheme; so one of the first steps was to run a Bible-study series examining the theological rationale for caring for creation. "It's not just being a good 'lefty' person: this is a core part of our discipleship," Ms South explains.

Besides hoping to expand the project further, she advises churches thinking of embarking on their own green projects always to begin with the theology. This is also vital in creating allies, encouragers, and a support network for church environmental officers, who often begin as lone voices.

"As a congregation, our journey only properly got started once we had started to think about the theological reasons for it. That was really important for us."