

Dear Eco Congregation friends

Happy New Year to all! Welcome to the January 2017 edition of the Eco Congregation Ireland newsletter. Let's commit to another year of looking after God's wonderful creation!



Are you interested in learning more about Eco-Congregation Ireland?

Perhaps your congregation or parish has an interest in the environment and has thought about becoming an Eco-Congregation? The Eco-Congregation Committee has Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of Ireland and Quaker representatives on it and they are happy to come to speak to your group no matter how small! The contact details are listed at the end of this newsletter.

Did you know we are on Facebook? You can access the Eco-Congregation Ireland Facebook profile [here](#) or just go to facebook.com and search 'Eco-Congregation Ireland'. It's a great place to keep up to date with ECI's activities and access current news and information from other NGOs and faith organisations.

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Our Climate Justice Candle – the journey continues!

Since our last newsletter, ECI's Climate Justice Candle has visited **Rathdrum Church of Ireland, Gorey Church of Ireland, Wexford Church of Ireland, Enniscorthy Catholic Cathedral, Thurles Catholic Cathedral and Thurles Church of Ireland**. It is still continuing on its ecumenical and climate justice journey! If you would like to be part of this initiative, simply drop us an email to info@ecocongregationireland.com.

Awards! Awards!

In 2016 two faith communities received their Eco-Congregation Ireland Awards. **Sisters of Mercy, Western Province** received their award from Sr Catherine Brennan, Catholic representative on the Eco-Congregation Ireland committee, at the launch of their book 'Walking Gently on Earth' on Saturday November 26, in Knock House Hotel, Co Mayo. The book tells of the Sisters' efforts and commitment to live more sustainably at this time so as to protect 'Our Common Home'. It was published and presented as a requirement for their Eco-Congregation Award. The Congregation of the Mercy Sisters of the Western Province is the first ever Religious Congregation to receive this award. Read more about this event [here](#).



On December 4th 2016, the parishioners of the **Church of the Ascension of the Lord, Balally**, situated in the foothills of the Dublin mountains, welcomed Sr Catherine Brennan to their Sunday Eucharist. The occasion was the presentation to the parish of the Eco-Congregation Ireland Award in recognition of the parish's long engagement with the issues of climate change and climate justice. In an inspiring [homily](#), Monsignor Dermot Lane, Parish Priest of Balally, reminded the congregation that humanity needs to recover our bond with the natural world, that respect and care for the beautiful earth, Our Common Home, is an integral part of our Christian faith and mission, that 'being a Christian in the 21st century carries with it a commitment to care for God's creation, not as optional, but as something essential to Christian faith today.' Read more about this event [here](#).



Diocese of Kerry Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Committee attends Stop Climate Chaos event in Buswells Hotel, Dublin

Two members of the Diocese of Kerry Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Committee, Sr Maureen O'Connell PBVM and Sylvia Thompson, travelled to take part in the [Stop Climate Chaos Meet Your TDs](#) event in Buswells Hotel, Dublin on Tuesday 15th November. The Dublin event was organised by [Stop Climate Chaos](#), [Friends of the Earth](#) and [Trócaire](#). The aim was to get TDs to sign three separate letters addressed to the respective ministers on:



- 1 Fair payment for solar electricity exported to the grid
- 2 Divesting the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund from Fossil Fuels
- 3 Realigning investment to achieve the Goals on the Smarter Travel Policy

Of the Kerry TDS Sr Maureen and Sylvia met either on the day or later at their clinics back in Kerry, the following were happy to sign the letters - John Brassil (FF), Martin Ferris (SF) and Michael Healy-Rae (Indep). Sr Maureen and Sylvia found the day a wonderful and enriching experience to meet with a wide group of people, all committed to caring for 'Our Common Home' from a variety of sectors, including faith based groups.

Trócaire – A Just Faith Retreat for Young Adults

From 4-5 February 2017 young adults can join Trócaire for a reflective weekend to learn more about Catholic Social Teaching, the root causes of poverty and what they can do about it. Pope Francis says: 'Let us become agents of God's mercy, channels through which God can water the Earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish'. For more



information on this retreat contact Maria Kane Maria.Kane@trocaire.org or phone +353 1 5053 298. Visit [Trócaire](http://Trocaire) to learn more.

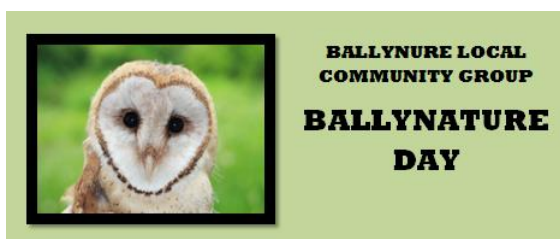
Drumalis Environment Group - Re-inhabiting the Earth Spring Conference, 10-12 February 2017



The annual [Re-inhabiting the Earth Spring Conference](#) will take place from 10-12 February at Drumalis, Larne, Co Antrim. The theme will be 'One Family ... One Common Home' and the keynote speaker is Dr Lorna Gold, Head of Policy and Advocacy from Trócaire. This weekend will develop themes from previous Spring Conferences - Caring for our Common Home, Be the Change, Climate Change, Enough is Plenty, etc. It will connect with the publication of a new papal document on the family, Amoris Laetitia, look forward to the World Gathering on the Family in Ireland in 2018, and address some fundamental questions around these themes. Contact Drumalis for more information on 028 2827 2196 or drumalis@btconnect.com.

Ballynure Day – 25 February 2017

Ballynure Local Community Group is holding a free family fun day on Saturday 25 February 2017 from 11am to 4pm. There will be over 30 exhibitors present representing various organisations including environmental groups. This fun day out for the family will include:



- Kids games and crafts
- Minibeast safaris, birds, butterflies, bats, horses, ponies, chickens, dogs, etc
- Countryside skills - bushcraft, blacksmiths & woodworkers
- Learn lots about our local wildlife, culture and heritage
- Storytelling, Ulster Scots talks and much, much more for the whole family

The event is in and around Ballynure Presbyterian Church Halls, Ballynure Village, County Antrim. More information is available from Kay at ballynure@hotmail.co.uk.

Apple Tree planting in Ballymacelligott Parish, Diocese of Kerry

Apple Tree planting took place in the two churches in Ballymacelligott Parish, Co Kerry on Sunday 4 December 2016, another step in the Earth Week 2016 Laudato Si Biodiversity Project. The parishioners were also involved in planting some wildflowers - oxeye daisies, foxgloves, teasels and crocus, all helping to give food for our endangered bees as part of the [All-Ireland Pollinator Plan](#). An insect/bug hotel was installed too. More wildflower seeds will be sown in the spring. Read more [here](#).



Laudato Si and Catholic Investing: Clean Energy for our Common Home

Following Pope Francis' urgent appeal for change in Laudato Si many more Catholic institutions are taking their place in the global climate justice movement through their voice and in their own actions. To galvanise the growing Catholic contribution to divest-invest action, a conference is being organised in Rome on 27th January entitled, 'Laudato Si' and Catholic Investing: Clean Energy for our Common Home'.



The conference is being co-organised by the Global Catholic Climate Movement, the International Union Superiors General-Union Superiors General, Trócaire, Cafod, FOCSIV and CIDSE. Participants at the conference will include representatives from Dioceses, Religious Congregations, Catholic educational institutions, Catholic Development Organisations and Catholic media from a variety of countries, spanning the continents. Key sessions will be recorded and available afterwards. More information [here](#).

Global Catholic Climate Movement

The Global Catholic Climate Movement is a global network of 400+ member organisations and a community of thousands of Catholics, responding to the Pope's call to action in the Laudato Si encyclical. The movement is made up of lay people, priests, religious and bishops working together to tackle the climate change crisis. The Movement encourages the Catholic family worldwide to turn Pope Francis' Laudato Si encyclical into action for climate justice, by undergoing our own ecological conversion, transforming our lifestyles and calling for bold public policies together with the wider climate movement. Their website is packed full of information and resources. Visit it [here](#).



The Global Catholic Climate Movement

Afri Féile Bríde 2017 - Solas Bhríde Centre, Tully Road, Kildare Town, 4 February 2017

Afri's vision is of a more just, peaceful, equal and sustainable world. [Afri](#) seeks to inform debate and influence policy and practice in Ireland and internationally on human rights, peace, global justice, and sustainability issues. Afri particularly responds to injustice caused by militarisation, and by environmental destruction and resource depletion. They do this through analysis, education and action in solidarity with marginalised people in the 'Global South' and also in Ireland and elsewhere in the so-called 'developed world'.



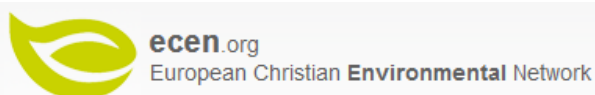
Feile Bríde happens annually in Kildare around the start of spring in February. It is a time for celebration and reflection in the spirit of Brigid's message of justice, peace and hope which is as relevant as ever today. Among the issues to be explored at this year's [Afri Féile Bríde 2017](#) conference will be forced migration - the inevitable consequence of war and climate change. A great opportunity to hear Scottish Quaker [Alastair McIntosh](#) talk about forced migration, climate change and peace. Book and learn more [here](#).

Pray and Fast for the Climate

[Pray and Fast for the Climate](#) is a movement of Christians praying and fasting on the 1st of each month for climate justice. The movement started off in the UK, but now includes people from all over the world. Each month they produce a very informative list of [prayer points](#) for use individually or in public worship. Join them in praying and fasting each month.



Faith Communities and Environmental Activism Conference



[European Christian Environmental Network](#) together with

other partners, the University of Edinburgh and the European Society for the Study of Religion are involved in organising the conference 'Faith Communities and Environmental Activism', which will take place from 18 - 20 May 2017 in the premises of the University of Edinburgh. You are invited to respond to the call for papers, which you will find at the [conference web page](#), as well as information about the background of the conference and the conference [programme](#). For further information please contact: m.northcott@ed.ac.uk.

2016: The Warmest Year on Record and One of the Most Politically Traumatic - A Report from Adrian Shaw, Church of Scotland Climate Change Officer

Adrian Shaw, Church of Scotland Climate Change Officer has produced a very informative summary of climate change developments and the momentous political developments of 2016 with helpful suggestions as to how faith communities can respond to these challenges, including encouraging churches to become Eco-Congregations. Read his report in detail [here](#).

Mayo Dark Skies

Mayo Dark Skies is a community group that works to protect our night skies and help reduce light pollution. There is no doubt that artificial lighting has its place in our world and is invaluable to our businesses, homes, roads and recreation. However, when used inappropriately or excessively, artificial lighting can cause light pollution. Many of us are not aware that light pollution has adverse effects on the environment, our health, biodiversity, and our climate. Learn more about the Mayo Dark Skies Project through their [Facebook](#) profile where they share many very interesting articles about light pollution, astronomy, nocturnal wildlife and the beauty and importance of our dark skies.



Earth Hour for Churches – 25 March 2017

Earth Hour is the single, largest, symbolic mass participation event in the world. Born out of a hope that we could mobilise people to take action on climate change, [Earth Hour](#) now inspires a global community of millions of people in 7,001 cities and towns across 152 countries and territories to switch lights off for an hour as a massive show of concern for the environment.



Our friends at [Eco-Congregation Scotland](#) have partnered with [WWF Scotland](#) to encourage congregations to take part in Earth Hour 2017. They have produced a free information pack for churches, which can be downloaded from their website [here](#).

Fairtrade Fortnight 27 February - 12 March 2017

Thousands of farmers in countries such as Malawi, Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire all contribute to the tea, coffee and cocoa we enjoy in Ireland. And yet many of those farmers are still living in poverty. If people really knew the true human cost of exploitation, would they still make the same choices?

When we come together we can change the way people think about trade and the products on our shelves – the Fairtrade movement is made up of ordinary people doing extraordinary things in their communities for Fairtrade. Join hundreds of others across Ireland this [Fairtrade Fortnight](#) to help our friends, neighbours, colleagues and communities to put Fairtrade in their basket and take exploitation out.



Ballineaspaig Parish, Cork - Lenten Talks - The Wonder of Creation

Ballineaspaig Parish will hold a series of talks during Lent under the title 'The Wonder of Creation'. They will take place on the four Tuesdays in March, at 8.00pm in the Crypt, Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, Dennehy's Cross, Cork. The first, on 7th March, will be delivered by John Breen, an expert on Bees; the 2nd on 14th March will be by Tom Kelly, Ornithologist. The 3rd talk, on 21st March, will be given by Fr. Tim Carroll, who has a special interest in Cosmology. The final speaker, on 28th March, is Fr. Declan Mansfield, who will focus on scripture and its references to the wonders of the universe as God's creation. All are welcome!

Ballineaspaig Parish is twinned with Turkwel parish in Turkana, Kenya. Read more about their work there in their report on the [Eco-Congregation Ireland](#) website as well as their Christmas Gift initiative for children and their support and activism for Fairtrade.



Update on the 2016 work of SAGE in St Anne's Parish , Shankill

SAGE is the local ecumenical group in St Anne's Catholic Parish , Shankill which is concerned with climate justice issues. You can read about their activities in 2016 in their report on the [Eco-Congregation Ireland website](#). Some of their activities included taking part in Féile Bride 6th February; hosting the Eco-Congregation Ireland Climate Justice Candle the week starting 24th April; creating a noticeboard dedicated to matters concerning Climate Change in the church porch; providing a weekly prayer for the environment during Mass; including short excerpts from Laudato Si in the parish bulletin; taking part in the Stop Climate Chaos Meet Political Representatives event on 15 November and organising a Public Meeting involving Professor John Sweeney on 7 December as well as other activities!



Cashel, Ferns and Ossory Environmental Committee Conference

Cashel, Ferns and Ossory Environmental Committee are holding a half day conference entitled 'Inside and Out' on Saturday 18 February 2017 from 10am to 1pm on how to save energy expenses and new ways to improve your church environs. The conference will take place in Kilkenny College and admission is free.

Speakers include: Ruth Buggie from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland will speak about the €30 million of grants available under the Better Energy Communities Programme and how heritage buildings have benefitted under such SEAI schemes. Dr Úna Fitzpatrick from the National Biodiversity Data Centre will speak about how parishes can help encourage pollinators, thus helping bees and agriculture. Alison Harvey of the Heritage Council will also speak and then join the speakers for a Q&A session chaired by Councillor Malcolm Noonan from Kilkenny County Council. For more information or to book a place contact The Ven Andrew Orr on 087 419 6051.



'Our Common Home – Our Common Future': The Good News of the SDGs – Workshop

This workshop will be hosted by the Future We Need Group (FWN). FWN is a faith-based group comprising members from the Columbans, Franciscans, Loreto, Mercy Family and Presentation Sisters. They promote education and advocacy on sustainable development and peace issues. It will be an opportunity to discuss, reflect and ask questions about the Sustainable Development Goals and Laudato Si.

Charlie Bird former RTE Chief Correspondent will share his concerns about the big issues for our world today including Climate Change and Peace. This event will take place in Portlaoise Parish Centre on Thursday 9th March 2017 at 10.00am - 1.00pm (refreshments at 9.30). Entrance fee: €5.00.



The group has been collaborating since 2011, but more specifically post Rio+20 in 2012, making submissions and advocating pre the agreement on the SDGs. In March last year, with funding from Trócaire, the group produced an advocacy toolkit on the mining industry – '[Digging at our Conscience](#)'.

Creation Care Network in Northern Ireland – Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Creation Care Network in Northern Ireland is Saturday 18th March 2017 at 10.00am in First Donegore Presbyterian Church, Main Street, Parkgate, BT39 0DG. Everyone is welcome!



Directions to First Donegore Presbyterian Church from Belfast: Take M2 to exit 5 (Templepatrick/Ballyclare). Continue to roundabout at Templepatrick. At roundabout take 3rd exit (Paradise Walk). Continue for 1.2 miles then turn right on to Parkgate Road which becomes The Burn Road (continuing for about half mile). Church is on your left. More information from Bertie Stirling bertie.stirling@arocha.org.

Children from Baldoyle Parish, Dublin Learn about the Pope's Encyclical on Climate Change

In May 2015 Pope Francis published an encyclical on climate change. Laudato Si or Care For our Common Home was a call to action to all people around the world to take action on climate change. [Baldoyle Family Mass Group](#) ran a programme for the children of the parish to bring the encyclical to life and teach them the challenges we are facing regarding environmental degradation.



The programme ran over 5 weeks and each week a different theme was introduced. Stories, like that of St Francis of Assisi, were used to engage the children. They designed a poster of the water cycle, built bug hotels to learn about biodiversity, found out about climate justice through role play and played games on recycling and energy conservation. To culminate they prepared a montage for the church noticeboard and priest mentioned it to the congregation at Mass. The parishioners would like to thank An Taisce Green Schools, Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, Trocaire and Eco-Congregation for their resources which were used for the programme.

Seminars at An Gáirdín Organic and Ecology Centre, Portumna

An Gáirdín will be hosting three seminars this year on the following topics:

- 1 Laudato Si – Our Common Home: How can we reconnect with the sacred in nature?
- 2 The Diversity of Life: Awakening to the wonder and intimacy of the natural world.
- 3 What Can I Do? In an age of climate change how can we live positively?

Further details will be available on the An Gáirdín [website](#) and on [Facebook](#).

Eco challenge!

We reduced plastic bag waste so let's do the same with coffee cups! **Think before you drink!** The big coffee chains make billions of pounds in profit. Meanwhile, many of them have given us the impression their cups are recycled. And yet because of a plastic film on the inside, very few coffee cups actually are recycled, even if you put it in your own recycling bin. [Friends of the Earth](#) are encouraging us to end waste from coffee cups. Let's join their campaign to get the cafe chains to reward you for taking your own cup and to ban take-away cups that can't be recycled and get cafe chains to provide recycling bins.



Prayer for the Earth

Lord, allow my ears to listen to the cry of the earth, the voices of the people of the Global South, those who face the harsh reality of climate change.

Lord – I come to do your will.

Lord, allow my eyes to see the beauty of creation, in flowers, creatures, forests, and cities alike.

Lord – I come to do your will.

Lord, allow my voice to speak out for justice and ensure the voiceless are heard.

Lord – I come to do your will.

Lord, allow my hands to care for the earth, to toil, to reap, to celebrate

Lord – I come to do your will.

Lord, allow my feet to take the path les trod, to walk the extra mile, to take your message out in the world.

(Written by Fr Michael Fitzsimmons)

Bring reflections on global and climate justice and poverty into your worship activities, with prayers, liturgies and reflections from [CAFOD prayer resources](#).



If you have any information or stories from your congregation, parish, meeting or Eco Congregation we would love to hear from you! Please forward your news to us at info@ecocongregationireland.com. Don't forget, if you hold an event or meeting, please take some photos and we can include them on our website and our bi-monthly newsletter. If you want your event promoted in our bi-monthly newsletter, please email us about 2 weeks before the next newsletter is due out to ensure inclusion. Our next newsletters will be sent out at the end of March, May, July, September and November.

With kindest regards and blessings of this New Year,

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