**Gold Award for Carlow Union**

*Revd. David White*

**New Beginnings**

February is a great time to take stock and start planning for the year ahead. Much better than gloomy January, the signs of life in the natural world are balm to our wearied souls. Moya Cannon’s poem ‘A Song at Imbolc’ was very much in my mind as we welcomed Canon Andrew Orr to our parish to present our recently earned awards. Moya’s poem begins with the lines,

Now at spring’s awakening, short days are lengthening

and after St. Bridget’s Day. I’ll set my sail.

**A Liturgy to Mark the Start of the Growing Season**

We chose to have our awards presented at the annual Plough Sunday service which this year was held in St. Mary’s Church, Carlow on Sunday 6 February.

On Plough Sunday, soil, seeds, the plough are used to deepen our connection with God as we also ask God’s blessing on the people of the land and those who consume its produce. The plough is blessed representing the array of machinery that is involved in modern farming methods. The seed and soil are blessed as we give thanks for the potential for life that is all around us. And finally, the people of the land and those who enjoy its produce are blessed.

The Church of England’s *Common Worship* suggests:

*In days when work was scarce in winter, the observance looked forward to the time of sowing with the promise of a harvest to come. Some Christian communities have reintroduced it as a focus for asking a blessing on human labour near the start of the calendar year.* (p. 597)

**Different Themes**

Every year the liturgy has had a different theme. Lorna Sixsmith came to speak to us the year that we were celebrating the contribution of women to farming in Ireland. Another time we heard about the work of a charity working in Africa. Jane Mellett from Trócaire spoke about climate change and the Pope’s encyclical on the environment, Laudato Si’.

Every year has its own focus which reminds us of the complex nature of our relationship with the natural world. As a Church of England resource, referring to the liturgies which mark the various seasons of the agricultural year remarks, *‘Much of this is bound up with the need to provide food to sustain human life, and the accompanying sense of a proper humility before God as source of all things, gratitude for his goodness, and responsibility in stewarding the resources of the earth. In more recent years, urban congregations have explored ways of adapting traditional creation-based festivals for their own contexts. This provision is not intended to limit such adaptation.’*

**Plough Sunday 2022**

This year’s theme was ‘Biodiversity’ and we were delighted that the children could lead most of the service. After all, it was them that started our ‘Welcoming Parish to All God’s Creation’ project back in 2017.