

## **The Flourish Initiative audit report. September 2025.**

### **Introduction to the Archbishop of Armagh's "Flourish Initiative".**

In 2022 the Archbishop of Armagh, the Rt. Rev'd John McDowell launched a Diocesan wide environmental programme for all parishes in Armagh Diocese known as the Flourish Initiative. This was (at the outset) a pilot three year project for the Diocese with an understanding that shared learning from the parishes involved might also be communicated across the wider Church of Ireland.

The initiative initially saw an uptake of 10 parishes seeking to develop and promote environmental matters and projects within their own faith communities. These parishes (and a further 4 parishes who later joined) make up the Diocesan Flourish working group.

Across the three years of the initiative a number of specific actions have occurred including....

- Visits to local Christian environmental projects by way of learning as to parish based environmental concerns.
- Regular Flourish working group meetings by way of shared learning, resourcing and occasional guest speaker input, notably the Ulster Wildlife Trust, Keeping Northern Ireland Beautiful and the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. Parishes were also sign posted to funding on environmental project development.
- The dissemination of resources and practical ideas to all parishes across Armagh Diocese in regards to Creation Care, for example via the Big Bulb plant and the giving of native Irish tree saplings to every Parish.
- The production of a Flourish Initiative video highlighting local Parish Flourish projects. This was disseminated across the Diocese and the Church of Ireland.
- With the support of Mr. Jonathan Hull, regular social media updates to the Diocese as to the work of the Flourish Initiative were regularly communicated.
- The dissemination of Christian environmental resources in relating to Youth and Children's ministry.

### **Structure of the Flourish Initiative audit.**

Based on an adapted version of the Eco-Congregations Ireland environmental awareness audit ([www.ecocongregationsireland.com](http://www.ecocongregationsireland.com)) in April 2025 a Diocesan wide Flourish Initiative audit was administered across Armagh Diocese. Again, with the kind help of the Diocesan Communications Officer, Mr. Jonathan Hull, all parishes were contacted as to the audit and directed via a response link to the Diocesan website where the audit was to be completed.

The audit sought to better understand the impact of the Flourish Initiative between 2022 to 2025 and assess current and future needs in regards to the local Parishes and their ministry across environmental/ Creation Care issues. The audit was broken into the following sections which will form the basis of the audit report and analysis...

- Environmental issues and the worship experience of parishes across Armagh Diocese.
- Environmental/Energy use matters across respondent parishes.
- Bio-diversity initiatives and bio-diversity promotion across sample parishes.
- Uptake of the Flourish Initiative, an overview.

The Flourish audit was administered to all 41 Parish groups in the Diocese with 16 Parish groups returning the audit questionnaire. This represents a 39% return and is statistically a valid sample from which to analyse the impact of the initiative to date.

## **Summary of findings from the Flourish Initiative audit 2025.**

What follows is a summary of findings arising from the 2025 Flourish audit. To read the audit in its entirety, please visit the Armagh Diocesan website, [www.armagh.anglican.org](http://www.armagh.anglican.org)

### **Environmental issues and the worship experience of parishes across Armagh Diocese.**

Throughout the worship life of parishes in Armagh Diocese, it was clear that environmental concerns were featured through services via the singing of hymns, prayers and on special Sunday services notably at Harvest time. "Creation time" (1<sup>st</sup> September to the 4<sup>th</sup> October) was rarely if ever observed within the Church calendar.

In response to a number of questions such as the use of Christian environmental resources, undertaking an environmental Bible study or inviting a speaker to address environmental matters, between 69% and 75% of respondents "Would Consider" such support. It would seem that there is an genuine openness to parishes being better resourced as to environmental concerns in the worship and discipleship life of local congregations. Encouragingly, 25% of respondent parishes to the audit were regularly engaging with environmental concerns during services.

### **Environmental/Energy use matters across respondent parishes.**

On environmental practical matters, the Flourish audit revealed a widespread take up across respondents of energy saving initiatives. The use of appropriate rooms and heating, regular review of heat and light usage, and saving electricity use in general were all well established practices. 75% of parishes noted a need to switch to environmentally-friendly cleaning products and 62.5% noted a desire to install water saving devices. In terms of parish buildings, 50% "Would consider" better insulation. In regards to purchasing Fair-trade products, using local suppliers and promoting a more sustainable local community and using farming markets up to 75% of respondents indicated an interest in doing more along these lines in regards environmental concerns.

### **Bio-diversity initiatives and bio-diversity promotion across sample parishes.**

The data originating from this section of the Flourish Audit reveals some interesting findings. Covering questions such as promoting bio-diversity in parish grounds, planting native species and trees that promote bio-diversity, establishing bird boxes and bat boxes, publishing green (environmental ) tips in the parish newsletter and establishing outdoor areas for prayer and contemplation; the vast majority of respondents indicated a desire to do more on these issues (between 50% to 75% of returns). In response to local Churches establishing recycling points for parishioners to utilise it was noteworthy that 37.5% of respondent churches were already engaging with this activity. Clearly there is on-going local parish initiative on bio-diversity actions and a desire to further expand learning and development. In regards to transport to and from Church, 50% of parishes indicated that they would not encourage walking or cycling to Church potentially due to the Armagh Diocese being predominately rural. Whilst 12.5% of respondents were participating in local community environmental policy development and linking with environmental initiatives such as Tidy Towns, Friends of the Earth, and the Wildlife Trust again, up to 75% indicated they would consider further involvement.

### **Uptake of the Flourish Initiative, an overview.**

This section sought to establish how well the Flourish Initiative was understood across the Diocese and what specific Flourish Initiative actions might best support local parishes in their environmental mission.

In response to the question, “Have you heard of the Flourish Initiative? Nearly 70% responded yes. In response to how parishes connected with the Flourish Initiative and the projects range of activities, the following data acts as a useful summary...

- Being part of the Working Group...: 19% (4)
- Undertaken an environmental project...: 14 % (3)
- Completed the Big Bulb Plant initiative...: 19% (4)
- Planted of one the oak saplings...: 29% (6)
- Used one of the online resources...: 10% (2)
- Applied for funding ...:10% (2)

Finding ways and means for the Flourish Initiative to support parishes in regards to using on-line environmental resources and in applying for environmental funding seems to be an area of real need given lack of take up to date.

Finally, 31% of parishes indicated that they currently were engaged in an environmental project (not necessarily under the Flourish banner) and 67% of parishes indicated a willingness to see parish based environmental projects “as an agenda item on each Select Vestry meeting”. This is a very encouraging finding and potential future area for Flourish support.

### **Key conclusions arising from the Flourish Initiative audit.**

A number of conclusions can be taken from the Flourish Initiative audit now that the project has completed its original three year cycle...

- There has been significant engagement with the Flourish Initiative both by parishes represented in the working group and the wider Diocese.
- There is a widespread interest across the Diocese in matters affecting the environment and in teaching around Creation Care
- Where parishes have made significant advances, there has been a pre-existing interest or a local champion or advocate has been evident. Also, where an incumbent takes a personal interest in these matters, there would seem to be a better uptake.
- There appears to be a blockage in some parishes between the desire to get involved and actually getting involved, possibly due to vacancy, workloads or other priorities.

### **Key recommendations arising from the Flourish Initiative audit.**

The Flourish Initiative has across the last three years seen local parishes and the initiative itself at a Diocesan level grow and become better established. What follows are a number of clear recommendations for the continuation of this work and its critical mission in the furtherance of Christ's Kingdom.

- The Flourish Initiative continues for the next 3 years but with a new set of goals and objectives to cover this period
- Creation Care is added to Select Vestry agendas for a trial period of 3 years and the impact assessed on conclusion
- A Creation Care champion is identified in each parish
- Champions (and others) within parishes are given more specific training and support to allow them to be effective in the role.
- Resources are made available to support incumbents, Youth groups and Sunday Schools to enable a focus on Creation Time, Rogation and Harvest in particular.
- Additional support is given to those parishes who need help in implementing a local project
- All ongoing projects are more widely publicised at parish and Diocesan level.

**Rev'd David McComb and Mr. David Brown. September 2025.**