**Do something small - be part of something big**

About two dozen Christians from across Devon gathered at St. Edward’s church, Eggbuckland, Plymouth on 24th October to share stories and experiences in becoming an Eco Church and an Eco Diocese. This is a national award promoted through conservation charity A Rocha, with 38 churches already registered in Devon and with 11 having received a bronze or silver award.

Under 5 topics, congregations are encouraged to look at ways in which they use resources in order to better protect and preserve the integrity of God’s Creation. These include Worship and Teaching; Buildings and Land; Community and Global action; and Lifestyle. By logging on line (<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>) a local church is able to assess its achievements and impacts in these areas, and to look for new steps to take to reduce carbon and live more sustainably.

Amongst those attending were award winners Tavistock Methodist Church, Lee Abbey Fellowship and Plymouth Unitarian Church. St. Edward’s itself (Anglican) has a Silver award and specialises in caring for its churchyard with a bug hotel, bee hives, careful grassland maintenance and ancient trees.

As well as other achievements, Belmont Chapel in Exeter has installed solar PV panels and has a well-insulated building. Other churches have switched to 100% green energy tariffs or undertaken energy conservation and efficiency measures. At least 9 churches have composting toilets, dozens are committed to Fairtrade and some clergy have changed to electric bikes or cars.

Participant Sarah Cracknell from Brixham said, “The Devon Eco-Church Gathering was a wonderful chance to meet with others from a range of different churches and to hear the inspiring things they are doing to care for God’s creation. It was a great opportunity to share knowledge and experiences and to get some great ideas to take away and put into practice. One of the highlights of the day was the guided walk around St Edwards living churchyard in the glorious Autumn sunshine and to see and hear both the successes and challenges of balancing the needs of the wildlife and those visiting to mourn.”

Bishop of Plymouth, Nick Mckinnel, also participated in the day and commented, *“Doing something small – and being part of something big”* was an appropriate theme as we explored what it means for Exeter to be an Eco-Diocese.  There were encouraging reports from across the churches of renewable energy sources, conservation measures, living churchyards and many small ways in which congregations are responding to the challenges of climate change as we remember that *“the earth is the Lord’s, and all that therein is”.*

David Curry, Diocesan Environment Adviser, reminded people of the need to think longer-term in leaving a positive legacy for our children’s children, which includes planting native trees, orchards and hedgerows for the future. “This must be a vital part of our Christian ministry today, not an add-on!”