



The Eco Saints group with the President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Gill Newton (far right)



The Eco Saints at work, with the Revd Gill Newton

Young people sow seeds of justice

A group of young people are leading their church and community towards a more sustainable future, where social and environmental justice are entwined. They invited the President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Gill Newton, to see their first project.

“Even small changes we make can have a big impact on people and the environment,” Jasmine (15) tells the Revd Gill Newton. Jasmine’s sister, Eliza (13), adds: “Planting greenery and encouraging wildlife are simple things to do and are vital in protecting God’s creation.”

The sisters are part of the Eco Saints group at Trinity Methodist Church in Bramley, Leeds. The group formed last year after other young people in the church read about the national Eco Church scheme and suggested getting involved.

After gaining the backing of church leaders and members, the Eco Saints came up with ideas for their first project – transforming an area of disused land behind the church into an eco-friendly community peace garden.

“We all got together and made a model of the garden in a seed tray to gather our ideas,”

explains Sam (10). “We talked about what we’d need, such as a firm level path for our older church members, and bushes to give refuge to wildlife.”

The group took their ideas to the church council, which was delighted to give its go-ahead. The young people, led by Junior Church leader Tina, then immediately got to work with sourcing second-hand materials and appealing for donations of plants and shrubs.

Working flat-out

Fundraising events, including a sponsored swim by Sam, were held so that other items could be bought. Meanwhile, the young people were working flat-out at the site in their spare time to ensure the soil was dug and weeded before the path was laid.

“One day, we moved two tonnes of



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materials by hand to make the path! It was hard work, but we had great fun," Liam (13) elaborates.

A huge part of the work was researching and selecting the right plants for the garden in order to attract insects, and planning a layout including hiding places for birds and small mammals.

"We wanted plants that are native to our country and locality," adds Liam.

Tina explains: "The garden is a large area, so we're lucky to have a lot of support from local people. Many of the plants have been donated by people who have split plants in their own gardens or have given us cuttings."

Faith in God

The group is acutely aware that their local project connects with what goes on in the wider world and with their faith in God.

"If we raise awareness of the importance of looking after people and the environment in our community, the hope is it will spread. Eventually, our little efforts will add up to make a difference globally," says Liam. "In the Bible, the book of Genesis tells us that God wants us all to care for the planet."

Sam adds: "Our garden will be a peaceful place for people who need somewhere to rest or pray when the church is closed."

The Eco Saints are also encouraging their families and other community members to make small eco-friendly changes to their lifestyles.

With an Eco Church category award for 'worship' already in the bag, the church and its Eco Saints are determined to eventually gain full Eco Church status.



Sam weeds the new flower bed



The site in the early stages of clearance



Planting work begins

More information about the Eco Church scheme, run by environmental charity A Rocha UK which supports churches wanting to demonstrate that the gospel is good news for God's earth, can be found at: ecochurch.arocha.org.uk



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"The young people walked me round their garden, and I was really impressed to see the results of their work so far. They talked me through their plans for the next phases, including installing a large wooden cross, from recycled materials, at the garden's centre. Then they invited me to join in with some weeding, so I popped on my gardening gloves and got to work!

I was struck by how the project has brought different age groups together, and by how passionate the Eco Saints are about their garden and about striving for the Eco Church award.

With many corporations and world leaders still struggling to commit to making a meaningful difference on environmental issues, the Bramley young people are doing what we've all got to be doing – pursuing the green agenda for ourselves in our local communities."

The Revd Gill Newton, President of the Methodist Conference

The Methodist Conference has set a target of becoming a net zero carbon emissions Church by 2030. The Church's Action for Hope strategy has been developed to help us to stay focused on our journey towards this. You can find out more at: methodist.org.uk/ActionForHope