

A Case Study:

Creation Care's role in influencing a discernment journey, enabling new church volunteers to emerge, and assisting the formation of new missional relationships

Hannah Mayo is a Self-Supporting Minister (SSM) at the Parish of Westcott near Dorking. She was brought up in a vicarage, which she recalls was largely a really positive experience. Hannah says, 'my faith kicked into gear mid-teens and I was really fortunate to be part of a wonderful young people's fellowship in St Albans, cramming into a small semi every Sunday night to sing, hear a talk, pray and socialise. However, the possibility of ordination wasn't on my radar until around six years ago.'

Creation care was absolutely key to Hannah's discernment experience and journey into ordained ministry.

Nine years ago she chaired a panel on climate change at the Greenbelt Festival, exploring our response to the issue as people of faith. On returning to her parish she lobbied her vicar at the time for the church to get involved in A Rocha's Eco Church initiative. Being a good delegator, he gave her the responsibility and Hannah formed an Eco Church group of people passionate about the environment fairly quickly achieving a bronze award, followed by silver.

Integral to the Eco Church model is Worship and Teaching, which meant Hannah led and preached at various services focusing on creation care and Eco-Church, enabling her to feel more comfortable 'at the front' of church. Her vicar was very supportive, subsequently putting her on the general preaching rota, and over time she became part of the leadership team. Although her confidence continued to grow, she admits she struggled how she had the authority to be preaching about non-creation care issues. Her vicar had a very simple response she was able to preach through the authority that he gave her, but Hannah thinks this was the start of God's nudge towards ordination.

Gradually that sense of calling developed further, and she recalls researching what it would mean to be an Ordained Local Minister and feeling the pieces drop into place. When her vicar confirmed that his thinking too, her formal discernment journey with the Diocesan Director of Ordinands began. It took a few years to work through the process, but after 3 years part-time training with the Guildford Diocese Local Ministry Programme, Hannah was ordained deacon in June 2025.

Through training Hannah stepped back from leading the Eco Church group, but it feels as if environmental concerns are now embedded in all aspects of church life. One regular expression of that is Forest Church, which happens once a quarter. Hannah initially led it, but it has opened up a pathway for other emerging volunteers and leaders to grow. This works well for people who might normally shy away from taking prominent responsibilities. She has observed how this, and other Eco Church activities, have enabled people to discover and unlock gifts and callings, and has given them increased confidence in using/following them.

In the wider community at Westcott there is sometimes blurry lines between Eco Church and initiatives in the village that are not really 'church things' - for example, 'Green Westcott', an initiative set up to encourage eco conversations and activities in the wider village community. It started as a partnership and now has a life of its own, its greatest achievement being the thriving community garden established in part of the closed churchyard at St John's Chapel, owned by the church. 10 to 20 people are regularly involved, including some from the church, and it meets a range of social and environmental needs, growing and sharing a wonderful variety of fruit and vegetables, the surplus used in the cafe in the Westcott Village Hub - a cafe and refill shop which brings together, and provides a sociable space for, people from across the community.

Some key replicable learning principles:

- ~ When Incumbents and other senior church leaders release people to serve in areas they feel passionate about (eg creation care), this can enable them to get a deeper sense of where God is leading them. Delegating and taking risks by giving people responsibilities is an important part of this.
- ~ Some activities associated with creation care / Eco-Church can enable new volunteers or emerging leaders to gradually step into more prominent roles in a way that gradually builds up their confidence and willingness to then take on new responsibilities.
- ~ Working on creation care issues is a great way for church people to forge new relationships with community groups in a way that brings the community into closer contact with the church, opening new opportunities for missional relationships and meeting specific community needs.