

# Church flowers and sustainability: Case studies



Credit: Pershore Abbey – Trudy Burge

See our case studies for some of the ways churches have been considering church flowers and sustainability, as well as further examples of church policies for flowers.

## CASE STUDY 1:

### Grown Not Flown – A sustainable flower festival in Beulah URC, Cardiff

In Beulah United Reformed Church, we have a strong tradition of using flowers and foliage as part of our worship. We are also an Eco Church and realise that caring for God's earth and seeking global climate justice means we must consider the environmental impacts of all aspects of our church life. This includes how we use plants and flowers in our flower arranging.



*Foral arrangements from Beulah URC's 'Grown Not Flown' sustainable flower festival in September 2022, taken by Colin Grimes*



## BUILDINGS/WORSHIP

In the spring of 2022, the Elders discussed how Beulah might mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the possibility of organising a flower festival was mooted. However, we felt the traditional pattern of using floral foam and imported flowers was no longer acceptable. Importing flowers from overseas can produce up to ten times the carbon footprint of locally grown flowers, and the foam materials commonly used in flower arranging are unsustainable and non-recyclable. A church member, Karen, oversees flower arranging at Beulah and is passionate about minimising our carbon footprint and promoting local, seasonal flowers and foliage. She suggested putting on a sustainable flower festival later in the year. The ethos of the festival would be that all arrangements would be created from locally grown blooms, plants and foliage and that there would be no use of floral foam.

The idea soon became a reality as local churches, organisations and businesses agreed to participate. Seeds and plants were handed out after worship to those willing to grow flowers for the festival. Over the summer, flower heads from plants such as lavender and hydrangea were donated for drying. As the festival was set up, people brought their flowers and foliage to decorate the church and contribute to the beautiful arrangements.

The culmination of this ambitious project was our spectacular Grown Not Flown Flower Festival between the 2 - 4th of September 2022, which provided an opportunity to enjoy the glorious and abundant flowers we have growing in our gardens and allotments. The festival ran for three days, with several hundred people coming into the church, some for the first time since the pandemic. As well as viewing the floral displays, visitors had the opportunity to hear from a local flower farm about earth-friendly growing methods. Karen has recently become an ambassador for Sustainable Church Flowers, whose vision is clear - 'to reduce pollution in our floral decorations by using carbon neutral flowers and less plastic'. We reached out to the local community, inviting them into the church to join us in going forward to glorify God sustainably.

***- With thanks to Mary Edwards from Beulah URC for sharing their story***



## BUILDINGS/WORSHIP

### CASE STUDY 2:

#### **Pershore Abbey's Eco-Friendly Christmas Wreaths**

Creative Abbey members from silver awarded Eco Church made wreath rings using willow from a branch that broke during Storm Arwen for their Christmas Wreaths in 2021. Read more about why here: [ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/eco-friendly-christmas-wreaths-pershore-abbey/](https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/eco-friendly-christmas-wreaths-pershore-abbey/)

Pershore Abbey is gradually embracing being foam-free and has an unwritten policy that at least one floral decoration will always be foam-free. St Mary's Church, Wick, part of the same benefice, also has an informal policy, whereby the flower team and their coordinator simply decided that they would do all of their floral displays without foam – the results have been wonderful.

*– With thanks to Trudy Burge and Claire Lording*





## BUILDINGS/WORSHIP

### CASE STUDY 3:

#### **St Bartholomew's Harpley's 'Foam Free Church' policy**

St Bartholomew's Harpley was involved with founding the Sustainable Church Flowers movement. They have also implemented a sustainable church flowers policy included below as an example. They are a foam-free church that achieved their silver award in 2019. Across the Diocese, with Bishop Martin Gorick, diocesan Environment Champion, they promote being a foam-free church and the use of churchyard flower arrangements.

#### **Policy for flowers at St Bartholomew's**

Now that we are a Silver Eco Church we are also a Foam Free Church. This means that we arrange flowers for all services and events without the use of floral foam (commonly called 'Oasis'). Please avoid using oasis and plastics.

The reasons for this are:

1. Floral foam is a by-product of the Petroleum Industry and is a plastic derivative.
2. Floral foam takes up to 500 years to degrade. "Enhanced Degradable Foam" is also a plastic product and degrades (but does not compost) to microplastics in under five years IF it is placed in "Ideal Landfill Conditions" (Oasis Website) so it is no better for the environment.
3. Several known ingredients of Floral Foam are Carcinogenic so when left in the Churchyard is not good for the environment or for the people working with it.
4. The water in which Floral Foam is soaked contains billions of chemical-ridden microplastics, which are then poured down a drain to contaminate the water system and, eventually, the Marine Environment.

For Weddings and Christenings, we prefer flowers in waterproof containers.

For Funerals, we prefer a tied bunch on the coffin or flowers arranged in moss, soaked newspaper or wet sand.



## BUILDINGS/WORSHIP

### CASE STUDY 3:

#### **Disposal of Floral Foam:**

The best, though still not perfect, way to dispose of used or unused floral foam is in landfill. So make sure that you put it into the correct bin and that it does go to landfill. Here the leeching of micro-plastics and chemicals from the foam is at least in an already contaminated area.

Water used to soak foam is more problematic as it is also full of microplastics and chemicals. So it should not go down the drain under any circumstances or into any place where it can soak into the water table.

*- With thanks to Jen Denniston and Candy Connolly*

### ST JAMES CHURCH, NEW BRADWELL:



### POTATO DOOR SWAG - SUE COLE:





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# BUILDINGS/WORSHIP

PERSHORE ABBEY – TRUDY BURGE:





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