

W A N T A G E D E A N E R Y

S U S T A I N A B L E C H U R C H F L O W E R S M O T I O N

The Reverend Benji Tyler to move on behalf of Wantage Deanery Synod:
That this Synod, embracing the principles of the Sustainable Church Flowers movement, which encourages a living into the Fifth Mark of Mission by promoting the use of local, seasonal and fully biodegradable/compostable flowers and foliage without floral foam*,

- 1.) encourages a sustainable approach to church flowers throughout the diocese and
- 2.) strongly discourages the use of all floral foam in churches and churchyards across the diocese.

*OASIS®

This motion is brought to Diocesan Synod to raise awareness of the ecological plight that our environment faces, and especially where the church has been complicit in contributing to both greenhouse gasses and the crisis caused by plastic and microplastic waste, through its use of floral decoration in church buildings and churchyards.

The sixteen churches of Wantage Deanery have been steadily growing in this awareness and, amongst other eco-friendly changes, have adopted a sustainable church flowers policy, using only flowers and foliage grown seasonally, locally and sustainably, and also moving towards ceasing the use of all floral foam in its churches and churchyards.

The deanery invites the diocese to do the same.

This paper sets out the context and scope of the motion, which is rooted in the principles of the Sustainable Church Flowers movement. This motion is not an endorsement of Sustainable Church Flowers as an organisation, but one which aligns itself to the core principles of the movement

Sustainable Church Flowers (SCF) is a movement 'from the parish', founded in 2019 in Worcestershire which encourages churches to be 'Glorifying God sustainably'.

It comprises of a growing group of friends and a network of diocesan and county ambassadors, passionate about sustainability in our churches, cathedrals and churchyards.

Through a combination of the ambassador network, social media campaigns, workshops and evangelism SCF is providing information and support to churches and cathedrals, as it encourages positive change. SCF promotes the use of flowers and foliage:

- grown locally or within the UK (without the burning of fossil fuels)
- grown without the use of harmful pesticides and herbicides
- packaged without the use of unnecessary plastics
- grown by people who are paid a liveable wage and are justly treated
- that are never bleached or dyed
- that are non-invasive species
- that are never arranged in floral foam.

Overleaf highlights the current prevailing floral culture, exposes floral foam and lays out a possible ecclesial response



The international culture of floristry has been - and indeed largely remains - one driven by the demand for cheap flowers, available at any time of year. Wholesalers, retailers and supermarkets have all played their part in encouraging and facilitating this demand.

Heightened awareness of the fragile earth and humanity's place within the wider ecology is driving positive change in all areas of consumerism.

The place of flowers in our lives remains as important as ever, associated as they are with life-events, emotion, language and communication. It is good that they endure, not least as a way to express what it means to be human.

Sustainable Church Flowers is one voice amongst a growing number calling for a sustainable approach to the floral economy. It gently encourages a positive change towards a more equitable, planet-friendly and life-giving future, rooted in our belief in the everlasting love of the Creator God.

Sustainable Church Flowers encourages churches to rediscover old and sustainable ways to arrange using such things as chicken wire, flower frogs/pin frogs, and other natural structural supports that can be used to support designs. It also commends the frequently overlooked thing that flowers really love - water!

For nearly sixty years, churches around the world have used floral foam OASIS® for their arrangements.

OASIS®'s appeal is no mystery: it's unbelievably absorbent, is easy to transport, holds flowers tightly in place, and is incredibly easy to use. However, there is one drawback to floral foam: it is non-biodegradable. In our environmentally-conscious world, where David Attenborough's Blue Planet has captivated young and old alike, and every year sees the record for 'hottest year in recorded history' broken, this has become a major concern. Here are some facts about the stuff:

- it is a single-use plastic
- it is a PF foam that is produced from petroleum-based phenol, with the addition of formaldehyde
- it breaks down into microplastics that contaminate aquatic ecosystems
- floral foam with 'enhanced biodegradability' is still plastic.

Every floral arrangement created before 1954 was made without foam. But because it has been a staple of floral design programmes globally, it has become a mainstay for church flower culture too.

Which takes us back to that one difficult truth: once you know better, do you do better? It's hard when the harms associated with something like floral foam are largely invisible to us and perhaps don't even seem like a big deal. But plastic pollution (and, in particular, microplastic pollution) is a huge deal.

The fifth Mark of Mission of the Church of England states:

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Without this mark at the heart of our common life as a people trying to live with integrity, the command of God to tend and care for the earth is ignored.

In every service of baptism, confirmation and the renewal of baptismal promises there is a commission where the whole people of God promise to live out our everyday faith.

The commission is a well used and familiar part of our liturgy. However, it contained nothing about the vital importance of our care for the environment.

In 2022 the bishops of the diocese of Oxford, mindful of the primal biblical call to humankind for environmental care, called for a liturgical addition. Thus this question to the congregation is now inserted:

"Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth?
With the help of God I [we] will."

Now is the time for conversion.

For further information
suschurchflowers.com
londonflowerschool.com
smithersoasis.com
flowersfromthefarm.co.uk