

# Glorifying God SUSTAINABLY

## SUSTAINABLE CHURCH FLOWERS

issue ii



2023



**FLOWER PRODUCTION IN KENYA**

# WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The international culture of floristry has been for many decades - 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.



**PESTICIDE SPRAYING IN ETHIOPIA  
LARGEST ROSE GROWER IN THE WORLD**

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

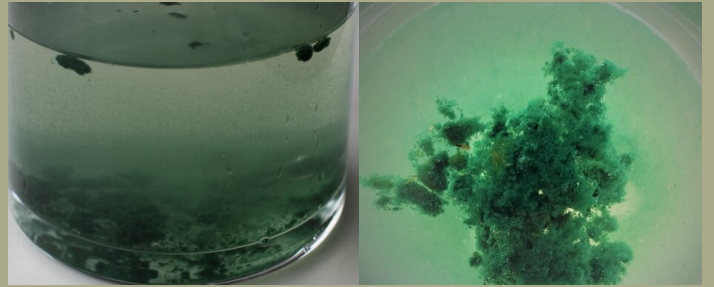
The place of flowers in our lives remains as important as ever, associated as they are with life-events, emotion, language and communication. It is good that they endure, not least as a way to express what it means to be human.



**POOR DISPOSAL OF WASTES FROM FLORICULTURE  
FARMS IN ETHIOPIA**

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

# THE MODERN INTERNATIONAL FLOWER INDUSTRY



FLORAL FOAM BREAKS DOWN INTO MICRO PLASTICS  
WHICH POLLUTE THE WATER SYSTEM

01

The world-wide flower industry has one of the largest outputs of cO2. Whilst there are significant emissions produced by the importation of flowers from places like Israel, Kenya and Peru (roughly 3kg cO2 per flower) this does not mean that UK or Netherlands-grown flowers are better. It is estimated that 79% of energy used in the Netherlands in agriculture is for horticulture.

02

The flower industry uses vast quantities of pesticides and herbicides to maintain quality. This leads to eutrophication and a polluting of water sources.

03

The excessive use of pesticides has a negative impact on pollinators. The bees are poisoned by this and the overall environmental impact, ironically, is that there is less fruit produced, and so the cycle spirals downwards.

## The Problems of Floral Foam

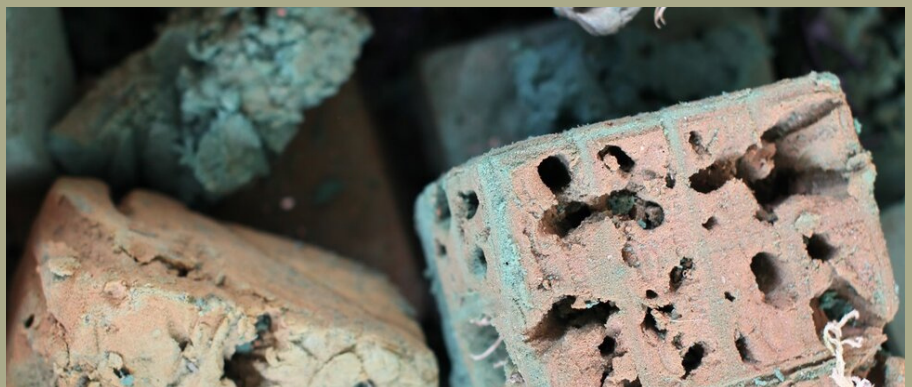
For nearly sixty years, churches around the world have used floral foam for their arrangements. Here are some facts about the stuff:

- 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
- it should NEVER, EVER be disposed of down the drain (or, for example, soaked in a bathtub...)
- floral foam with 'enhanced biodegradability' is still plastic.

Every single floral arrangement created before 1954 was made without foam. But because it has become a staple of floral design programs globally, it is also a mainstay in florists' toolboxes.

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.

*With thanks to  
@prairiegirlflowers*



- **FLORAL FOAM IS A SINGLE-USE PRODUCT MADE FROM PLASTIC.**
- **FLORAL FOAM, INCLUDING 'BIODEGRADABLE' FOAM, HAS NO PLACE IN SUSTAINABLE FLORAL DESIGN.**
- **A 2019 STUDY SHOWED THAT FLORAL FOAM HARMS AQUATIC ORGANISMS**

# SUSTAINABLE CHURCH FLOWERS ARE...

01

SEASONAL

02

LOCAL

03

NATURAL

04

BIODEGRADABLE/COMPOSTABLE

05

FOAM-FREE



Honeymoon farm St Mary's Church Fairford



Camomile & Cornflowers Stanbrook Abbey, Worcester

# WHAT ARE THE SUSTAINABLE CHURCH FLOWERS?

Genesis 2:15 "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it."

From the very beginning, God was in a garden. And in this garden he placed humankind and commanded them to tend and nourish it. When we obey God we bring glory to his name and we discover what it is to be more human.

God's glory is displayed in his creation and the best we can offer him is that creation in return. In our church buildings, home of God, the first home of his people, we place his creation, nurtured and tended by us as an act of true worship. Therefore:

- flowers enhance our worship and can be an expression of our attitude towards worship.
- flowers display gifts and vocations.
- flowers communicate the faith and act as a tool for mission, since they speak of life, beauty and the nurturing of the fragile.

## Sustainable Church Flowers (SCF)

is a movement 'from the parish', founded in 2019 in Harpley, Worcestershire. It is a small but growing group of friends, passionate about sustainability in our churches, cathedrals and churchyards, who are gently campaigning for change.

Through a combination of an ambassador network, social media campaigns, workshops and good old fashioned evangelism SCF is providing information and support to churches and cathedrals.

SCF encourages the use of locally grown flowers and foliage:

- 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
- never bleached or dyed
- not invasive species
- never arranged in floral foam.

SCF embolden floral decorators to rediscover old and sustainable ways to arrange using such things such as chicken wire, flower frogs/pin frogs, and other natural structural supports that can be used to support designs.

We also commend the frequently overlooked thing that flowers really love - water.

Now is the time to bring floristry back to the way God intended it!



# WHERE IS GOD IN THIS?



## Church as institution

### WE CAN ACT

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 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."**

## Church as individual

### I CAN ACT

A proactive response to any given call of goodness is driven both by a personal belief in its intrinsic merit and its benefit to society as a whole.

Each member of the Church is called back by their baptismal promises to regularly review their own practices and adjust their habits and lifestyle choices, with the support and cooperation of the wider community and the guidance of the Holy Spirit who leads into all Truth.

Therefore, that which each Christian individually practises, finds its fulfilment corporately so that 'I' and 'we' can together make a difference, and continue the task of building God's kingdom.

Sustainability is a call on individuals to consciously protect and nurture the environment not just for our own benefit but for the benefit of those who stand beside us and those who follow us.

Being sustainable doesn't just mean not taking away from, or decreasing, natural resources. It means that the potential for long-term future growth and availability is not violated. And the decisions we each make will make a difference.

## Church as intersection

### GOD CAN ACT

Holy Scripture is full of examples of the calling of God - often through his prophets - to return to God's way of living. This call to repentance, when heard and acted upon, always led to God being merciful, and averting the inevitable destruction that was headed for.

Jeremiah 26.3 is an example of this:

"Now therefore amend your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will change His mind about the misfortune which He has pronounced against you."

So it can be in our age. Our world - at the current rate of resource abuse - may be headed for ecological collapse and the destruction of civilisation as we know it, but there is hope.

The prophets of our own day - be they scientists, women & men of faith, eco-warriors or laity with a passion for the environment - need to be listened to.

Maybe, just maybe, disaster will be averted.

# PRACTICALITIES OF SUSTAINABLE CHURCH FLOWERS



Shane Connolly Flowers  
The Church of the Most Holy Redeemer London

## SEASONAL AND LITURGICAL

Many churches follow a Liturgical Calendar, and this can dictate whether flowers are appropriate (Christmas & Easter) or not (Lent & Advent).

This is an opportunity to delve into the rich history of flowers in our own cultures, to re-discover the meanings of certain blossoms and to reflect the diversity of religious & liturgical significance in how we choose to decorate our churches on specific occasions.

For this new way to succeed a whole different approach is required to the gathering and display of flowers within the church.

It may not always be possible to do the displays that we might hope for, but it is far more important to do what we can with what is available.

## SOME IDEAS FOR ACQUIRING

- Each week, a bucket is placed in or near the church and anyone is invited to leave contributions from their gardens
- The flower decorator produces or buys the (UK-grown) flowers and uses solely those
- Links are built with local flower growers i.e. members of the WI Country Markets/ allotment owners/community gardeners etc for a regular supply
- Pot plants are bought or loaned from decorators' homes
- Flowers and foliage are gathered from churchyards
- Links are built with local garden centres for the hiring of plants/trees.

"IF YOU LOOK THE RIGHT WAY,  
YOU CAN SEE THAT THE  
WHOLE WORLD IS A GARDEN"  
*FRANCIS HODGSON BURNETT*

# JOIN IN SUSTAINABLE CHURCH FLOWERS INVITES CHANGE...

Over the coming months and years, every church will be called to review their environmental impact, ecological practices and consumption of natural resources.

Join the Sustainable Church Flowers movement and support and encourage your churches in making planet-friendly, sustainable change for the glory of God and the good of all creation.

*further inspiration*

## *Websites*

[suschurchflowers.com](http://suschurchflowers.com)  
[honeysuckleandhilda.com](http://honeysuckleandhilda.com)  
[fierceblossoms.com](http://fierceblossoms.com)  
[flowersfromthefarm.co.uk](http://flowersfromthefarm.co.uk)

## *Instagram*

[@sustainablechurchflowers](https://www.instagram.com/sustainablechurchflowers)  
[@nofloralfoam](https://www.instagram.com/nofloralfoam)  
[@prairiegirlflowers](https://www.instagram.com/prairiegirlflowers)  
[@shaneconnollyandco](https://www.instagram.com/shaneconnollyandco)  
[@sustainablefloristry](https://www.instagram.com/sustainablefloristry)

## *Facebook*

[sustainablechurchflowers](https://www.facebook.com/sustainablechurchflowers)

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