




# CLIMATE SOLUTION: GROWING TREES

“There is a magic machine that sucks carbon out of the air, costs very little and builds itself! It’s called... a tree”  
**George Monbiot**



## THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

UK Churches and Christian organisations own or manage around 500,000 acres of land and control over £20bn of investment assets. This booklet will explore how:

-  Local churches can grow trees to benefit climate, nature and people.
-  Larger Christian landowners including national and regional church bodies can grow trees on a larger scale.
-  Churches and Christians can invest in climate solutions including forest restoration and tree growing.

## WHY GROW TREES

**For climate:** Forestry is the most significant carbon sink in the UK. In 2022 UK forests and woodland sequestered 18 MTCO<sub>2</sub>eq, around 4% of UK greenhouse gas emissions according to the Dept for Energy Security and Net Zero. Sustainable forestry also provides some long term carbon storage in wood products.

**For nature:** Diverse woodland supports major biodiversity, providing habitat and shade for wild and farmed animals.

**For people:** Practical benefits include flood defences, soil stabilisation and lowering temperatures, in addition to the health and wellbeing benefits of woodland to humanity.

## PROJECT DRAWDOWN

Project Drawdown identifies methods linked to tree growth and restoration as 5 of the top 20 potential climate solutions worldwide - together totalling more than the top solution:

- 5) Tropical forest restoration** (54.45 GT)
- 11) Silvopasture** - *trees with livestock* (26.58 GT)
- 14) Tree plantations on degraded land** (22.04 GT)
- 15) Temperate forest restoration** (19.42 GT)
- 20) Tree intercropping** - *trees with annual crops* (15.03 GT)

(CO<sub>2</sub>eq that could be sequestered globally 2020-2050 based on their Scenario 1, limiting warming by 2100 to 2°C.)

## TOP CAMPAIGN AIM:

10% or more of denomination and diocesan-owned land should be planted with suitable trees by 2030 unless other habitat areas designated for nature are demonstrated to be more or equally valuable. This excludes commercial forestry, and new trees should be mainly mixed native varieties supporting biodiversity. (See [Church Land Use Campaign](#))

## TREES IN THE BIBLE

“The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.”

**Genesis 1:12 NIV**

“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

**Jeremiah 17:7-8 NIV**



## Father Stephen Maxfield

Greek Orthodox Church & Nurseryman

‘I would encourage all of you, clergy, bishops, lay people, to take care of the trees that you are planting for at least three years, so that you don’t waste your money, that the trees do grow and are successful.’

# LOCAL CHURCHES - GROWING TREES

## PLANNING

### STEPS TO GET STARTED

Working with a partner like the Woodland Trust can help you access valuable expertise and advice as well as possible funding or free trees. You will need to consider key questions:

- What space have you got? Would smaller trees or a hedge be most suitable?
- Would trees that provide fruit or nuts be a good choice for wildlife or human visitors?
- What kind of trees would help biodiversity? Native broadleaf trees are better for wildlife.
- Whose permission do you need? CofE churchyard trees need archdeacon approval.

### PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Planting the wrong trees - avoid monocultures, invasive species or trees not suited to the locality. Get advice from experts.
- Planting at the wrong time - in the UK, tree-planting season is October to March. Plan in advance.
- Planting in the wrong place - Some sites are not suitable e.g. peatland or other valuable ecosystems. Need community buy-in and follow up care.

Climate Solution: Growing Trees 2



## CHURCHYARD

### ST ANDREW'S LUTON

February 2024: St Andrew's Church Luton launched a Community Garden as part of a local Peace and Wellbeing Hub which is located in a dense, urban setting. St Andrew's and its partners have planted a small orchard of Bedfordshire fruit trees and will be growing food together as well as turning amnestied knives into garden tools.



## LOCAL COMMUNITY

### ST LAWRENCE'S HUNGERFORD

St Lawrence's Church in Hungerford has planted over 6,800 trees in partnership with local landowners, Hungerford Environmental Action Team and the Woodland Trust.

Early planting included 420 trees at Hungerford Primary School. They went on to plant trees on a local charity-run estate and the Kirby estate.

Church volunteers mainly planted trees provided by the Woodland Trust, which provides free trees to schools and community groups.

“The Revd Mike Saunders, Vicar at St Lawrence's Church, said:

“We haven't done anything very radical, we've just planted trees, and you can plant a lot of trees. You know honestly, 800 trees in three hours is quite possible, I think it was a dozen people. We started at 9 in the morning, we finished at 12 and we had bacon butties at 10:30. What we've found is most blokes will do almost anything for a bacon butty.

“But wouldn't it be brilliant if every single church in the UK could plant as many trees as us if they wanted to, so really between us, the sky is the limit. We really could plant millions of trees, so why don't we?” (Full interview [here](#))

# LANDSCAPE SCALE - GROWING TREES



## CHRISTIAN ORGANISATION

### LEE ABBEY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Working on a steep gradient, 1080 native trees were planted by a working party of 20 over three days at [Lee Abbey Devon](#) in February 2024.

The new oak, rowan, birch, hawthorn, hazel and crab apple trees are replacing a patch of Norway spruce and Western hemlock which had been planted in the 1970s, and had been assessed as being at the end of their life.

Instead of the very dark and barren soil under the spruce and hemlock, the team are hoping to restore the rare Atlantic rainforest which grows in the surrounding area and is a precious habitat for wildlife. (Full story [here](#))

“ Ecological Officer, Corinne de Klerk, said:

“One of the values of Lee Abbey is simplicity, and within that taking care of creation. It is awe-inspiring, the estate that we have: the estate and farm are an integral part of the mission of Lee Abbey.

Being in an area with Atlantic rainforest, how amazing is that? The fact that it is significant for the climate in south west England, and we are part of that, of maintaining that, of regenerating that. We do believe that we should not just sustain but allow nature to regenerate.”

## PLANNING

### ASSESSING YOUR LAND

Regional and national Church bodies sometimes own considerable areas of land. Early steps include mapping your land and creating a land management plan. The Diocese of Oxford share how they went about the mapping task in the CofE document: [Managing Glebe Land for Climate and Biodiversity](#).

Land farmed by tenants still has potential for tree growing in hedges and margins or agroforestry projects.

WWF, Trillion Trees, WCS, Birdlife International and UNEP have produced [Tree growing for conservation and ecosystem restoration: A guide for faith-based actors](#) – a 33 page guide which takes faith groups through 6 steps for sustainable tree growing.

### COMMUNION FOREST

Larger tree-growing projects could join in the Anglican Communion's Communion Forest, growing trees, protecting forests and restoring ecosystems. They also have some [liturgy to use when planting trees](#).

#### Case Study: A partnership between the Diocese of Leeds and the Woodland Trust



Growing Trees - a partnership between the Diocese of Leeds and...



## REGIONAL CHURCH

### DIOCESE OF LEEDS

The Church of England Diocese of Leeds has worked with the Woodland Trust to identify areas of its glebe land which are suitable for growing trees, and this has been achieved at very little cost to the diocese. Staff from the diocese and the Woodland Trust tell their story in a 2023 Operation Noah case study video available on [YouTube](#) or the [Operation Noah website](#).



# INVESTMENT - GROWING TREES

## INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

## FIIND IMPACT HOW TO INVEST IN CLIMATE

FIIND Impact Foundation's Faith Impact Project published a report in 2021 on [How to Invest in Climate](#). This report identifies the most investable climate solutions from Project Drawdown's top climate solutions which includes forest restoration within the 'Land Sinks' category.

They discuss venture capital, private equity, private debt, and real assets investing in land sinks. They found 19 funds and strategies investing mainly in land conservation or land sinks-focused raising \$4.6 billion.

## GREEN INVESTMENT DECLARATION

Is your Church body starting or making progress on a journey in investing in Climate Solutions? Join our [Green Investment Declaration](#) to recognise the steps you are taking and encourage others to do more too!



## RESOURCES

Find more resources and actions to take on Growing Trees [here](#).



## INVESTING IN FORESTRY

## CoF E CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The Church of England National Investing Body known as The Church Commissioners for England holds significant investments in sustainable forestry, mainly in the US and UK totalling 92,000 acres. In 2022 these investments produced returns of 11.9% and were estimated to be absorbing 116,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>eq. Some of their forests also incorporate renewable energy from wind turbines including South Kyle (pictured above).



## RESPONSIBLE OFFSETS

## CLIMATE STEWARDS

Offsets should only be a last step after making every effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but a small proportion of high quality offsets can be a responsible way to address final, hard-to-reduce emissions.

[Climate Stewards](#) is an example of a charity which helps individuals and organisations to measure their carbon footprint, take steps to reduce it, and compensate for their emissions by supporting projects in the Global South which offer genuine, additional carbon savings. Projects include growing indigenous trees with churches, schools and smallholder farmers in Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania. They also have a pilot project with the Communion Forest.

“Climate Stewards Director, Caroline Pomeroy, said:

“A Rocha Ghana is working with smallholder farmers to grow a mix of indigenous and fruiting trees on the hilly shores of Lake Bosomtwe. Most are planted using an agroforestry model, where the young trees are interspersed with food crops including maize, banana and cassava. The trees stabilise and enrich the soil, cool the local environment and can be used to define the boundaries of farmers' land.” (images from Ghana, 2 years apart)

Climate Solution: Growing Trees 4