



ECHO

SEPTEMBER 2022 EDITION

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
ECUMENICAL CHURCH OF OCCITANIE
www.ourchurch.fr



THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES BEGIN THEIR ASSEMBLY

The 11th Assembly of the WCC has begun in Germany. This is the highest governing body of the WCC and it normally meets only every 8 years. With members attending from all over the world, it is the most diverse Christian gathering of its size in the world. Representatives from 352 Churches representing more than half a billion Christians around the globe will gather in Germany this week. Among those present will be members of the Iona Community to which some of the ECO Team belong. The assembly will gather amidst perplexities, anxieties, and fundamental questions about the way we inhabit the earth, make sense of our lives, live in society, and accept responsibility for future generations. These questions have been amplified by the global COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, the climate emergency, and manifestations of racism worldwide, which have further revealed structural economic inequality, gender discrimination, and other forms of injustice in our societies and in our world.

In this fragmented and fractured world, the assembly theme is an affirmation of faith that Christ's love transforms the world in the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Against the powers of destruction and sin, the assembly theme affirms that the love of the compassionate, crucified, and risen Christ is at the heart of this world. It is a radical call to the churches to work together unceasingly and with people of other faiths and all those of good will for just peace and reconciliation. It is a call for the visible unity of the church to become a prophetic sign and a foretaste of the reconciliation of this world with God, and the unity of humankind and all creation.

The WCC held their first Assembly in 1948 in Amsterdam as the Soviet Union had cut off Berlin from the outside world, and the Berlin Airlift to bring in coal and food was in full operation. As they gather again 88 years later, Russian aggression towards Ukraine, as well as the Climate Crisis and disease and famine will be occupying delegates' minds and prayers. Please hold this Assembly in your prayers.

You can read more about this event online at

<https://www.oikoumene.org/events/the-11th-assembly-of-the-world-council-of-churches>



1948 (1st Assembly) vs 2013 (10th Assembly)



AND THEN MOSES RETURNED DOWN THE MOUNTAIN CARRYING THE STONES ON WHICH WERE INSCRIBED THE 20 COMMANDMENTS....

**CELEBRATING THE FEAST DAY OF
ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI
6TH OCTOBER 2022
MONTAIGU DE QUERCY - 82150
DATE FOR YOUR DIARY**

As we advised in last month's edition of ECHO, for a number of reasons it was necessary to change the date of our planned in-person worship in Montaigu de Quercy.

A new date has now been set: the afternoon of **Thursday 6th October**. Starting at 15h00, we will be holding a Communion Service in which we will celebrate the life and ministry of St Francis of Assisi, whose Feast Day falls on 4th October.

As Italy's patron saint, St Francis was a complex, and some would say controversial character. His life spanned the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries. He was born into a very wealthy family, but after what he called his 'conversion' standing before a crucifix, he renounced all his possessions.

In fact, he stripped himself of his of his wealthy garments in a public square in his home-town, Assisi. For the rest of his life he and his followers, including his feminine counterpart, St Clare, longed, prayed and worked for a life of simplicity – a lifestyle without luxury or privileges.

For the Franciscan brothers and the Poor Clares, this meant no private possessions at all. Francis saw that many poor people without these things, actually seemed to live happier and more fulfilling lives than the ambitious rich. He spoke of a simple life not shaped by money or power but by love and mutual concern. As his hymn says, 'it is in giving of ourselves that we receive'.

How did St Francis become the patron saint of animals ?

Saint Francis and his companions were making a trip through the Spoleto Valley near the town of Bevagna. Suddenly, Saint Francis spotted a great number of birds of all varieties ' doves, crows and others. Swept up in the moment, Saint Francis left his friends in the road and ran after the birds, who patiently waited for him. He greeted them in his usual way, expecting them to scurry off into the air as he spoke. But they didn't move.

Filled with awe, he asked them if they would stay awhile and listen to the Word of God. He said to them: "My brother and sister birds, you should praise your Creator and always love him: He gave you feathers for clothes, wings to fly and all other things that you need. It is God who made you noble among all creatures, making your home in the air. Without sowing or reaping, you receive God's guidance and protection."



At this the birds began to spread their wings, stretch their necks and gaze at the saint, rejoicing and praising God in a wonderful way according to their nature. Saint Francis then walked right through the middle of them, turned around and came back, touching their heads and bodies with his tunic.

Then he gave them his blessing, making the sign of the cross over them. At that they flew off and Saint Francis, rejoicing and giving thanks to God, went on his way.

Later, Saint Francis wondered aloud to his companions why he had never preached to birds before. And from that day on, he made it his habit to solicitously invoke all birds, all animals and reptiles to praise and love their Creator. And many times during his life there were remarkable events of Saint Francis speaking to the animals. There was even a time when he quieted a flock of noisy birds that were interrupting a religious ceremony! Much to the wonder of all present, the birds remained quiet until Francis' sermon was complete.

One famous story of St Francis is how he tamed a wolf which had been terrorising the town of Gubbio. St Francis confronted the wolf and called upon it to pledge never to harm the citizens of Gubbio again, in return for which they would not harm it. In a sign of the pledge, the wolf placed its paw in St Francis' hand. Thereafter the wolf lived peacefully in the town, and people fed it when it came to their doors.

In honour of St Francis, we are inviting those who are coming to join us on the 6th October to bring with them donations of pet food - canned or dried only please - which we will then pass to local animal shelters to help feed the animals they are caring for.

We will send out more details about this in the October edition of ECHO.



IONA SERVICE OF HALLOWING AND RENEWAL OF COMMITMENT 7 AUGUST 2022

ECO Worship frequently uses the Iona liturgy for its worship. Some members of the ECO Team have also joined the Iona Community.

After 2 years as Associate Members of Iona, Full Membership is conferred at an Annual Hallowing Service in Iona Abbey on the Isle of Mull. At the same service, all members of the Iona Community are invited to renew their commitment to the Iona Rule of Life:

1. **Daily prayer, worship with others and regular engagement with the Bible and other material which nourishes us.**
2. **Working for justice and peace, wholeness and reconciliation in our localities, society and the whole creation.**
3. **Supporting one another in prayer and by meeting, communicating, and accounting with one another for the use of our gifts, money and time, our use of the earth's resources.**
4. **Sharing in the corporate life and organisation of the Community.**



On the evening of 7th August several members of the ECO Team were able to participate by Zoom in the annual service.

We welcomed (hallowed) 7 new Members to the Community who had travelled to Iona for the ceremony and, in a sadder moment, we also commemorated and offered prayers for members of the Community who had died during the past year.

ECO are linked to the Central and Southern Europe Region of the Iona Community and as such we are represented at the World Council of Churches (see page 1)



Iona Words of Recommitment

Iona community members make this statement of recommitment at the annual service:

**“In the presence of our sisters and brothers,
near and far, and in the name of God,
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,
we commit ourselves to the purpose
and the Rule of the Iona Community.
We, being many, are one in Christ.**

**We will celebrate the wholeness of our life together.
Where it is fractured, we will work for reconciliation.
Where it is diminished, we will strive for its fullness.
So God, help is now and always.
Amen”**



11th September is the Feast Day of Saint Jean Gabriel Perboyre, First Catholic Martyr in China and the Patron Saint of Covid-19 Patients.

Janet Varty

There is a dusty looking old painting of a man ascending to heaven in the Church of Notre-Dame de l'Assomption in Castelfranc (46140). It is striking because, on close examination, he has a very long plait of hair hanging at his back.

During this end of August lull I decided to take the time to follow up on the life of this locally well-known saint.

Jean Gabriel Perboyre was born in Le Puech (46150) in 1802. It is an idyllic little hamlet with well maintained properties and just 13 kilometres from my home. The access is by single track road and when you arrive it is possible to view the house where he was born across a grassy paddock but there is no official marking for it.



In 1835 he was caught up in a wave of persecution and sadly one catechist, under torture, gave away Jean's hiding place. He was clothed in rags, bound, tortured and taken to a series of tribunals. Finally he was condemned to death.

It seems he was strangled on a cross in Wuhan. There is an image graphically depicting his death outside the church in nearby Montgesty. Jean was beatified in 1889 and then canonized in 1966 by Pope John Paul 11.

Christians in Wuhan today hold this Martyr close to their hearts and he has provided spiritual support to them during the recent Covid pandemic. Because of the manner of his death, sufferers from Covid have been recommended to pray to him.

I feel strangely drawn to the Christians in Wuhan now with this quite intimate connection to them through the life of this local man. Perhaps we can join with them by praying the words of the prayer attributed to him on his feast day.



There is a stunning statue in his memory where he stands in a gentle pose gazing at a crucifix he holds in his hand surrounded by neatly cut hedges.

Jean was asked to accompany one of his younger brothers to the seminary in Montauban to settle him in and found himself drawn to the religious life himself. He began his studies and hoped to be a missionary overseas but was hampered by ill health and it was his brother who set out for China.

Sadly his brother died and so Jean Gabriel volunteered to take his place, some thinking the long sea journey would be good for his condition. After some time in Macau learning Chinese he eventually travelled to the region of Hubei and spent some years serving the poor and teaching the Catechism.





Some Thoughts On The Eucharist

Revd Neil Batcock

The pandemic has called into question the ways and means of participating in the Eucharist, which for many Christians is the most important of services. I'm afraid I'm not about to offer any foolproof solutions; however, I would like to point out that aspects of the service have changed many times over the years, and some of the changes have been fundamental.

The biggest changes took place in the first three centuries AD.

From earliest times, the context of the Eucharist was a real meal, shared among the followers of Jesus. In the course of the meal, a prayer of thanksgiving ('eucharist') was said, thanking the Father for the bread and then sharing it out; similarly thanks were given for the cup (containing wine or water!), and the cup was duly passed round.

The early Church's prayer of thanksgiving was not dissimilar to the Jewish prayers of thanksgiving on the sabbath or at festivals such as the Passover. The striking innovation made by Jesus, and followed by his disciples, was that the bread was distributed, and that they all shared the same cup.

It should be emphasised that the bread was a single loaf. The earliest church catechism (from the 1st century), the Didache, expressed it rather poetically, and took into account the making of the loaf from many grains of wheat:

'For as the broken loaf was one scattered over the mountains and then was gathered in and became one, so may your Father's church be gathered together into your kingdom from the very ends of the earth.'

The main emphasis, as can be found throughout Jesus's life, was on giving thanks to the Father. A secondary emphasis was on the coming together of the church ('gathered together into your kingdom from the very ends of the earth.'). The one loaf and one cup were symbols of that unity.

So how did we get to where we are today? Why the individual wafers (as in Catholicism and Anglicanism), or the individual little glasses of grape juice (in Methodism)?

More fundamentally, why the change in emphasis from thanksgiving (eucharist) to the Father, towards a particular moment - the consecration (sometimes accompanied by the ringing of a bell) - when those officiating can signal that Jesus is now present? The answers to these questions can be found in a complicated sequence of history (which I will not go into here!).

But there is no doubt in my mind that much has been lost, and much misunderstood. In terms of the real presence of Jesus, did he not himself say, *'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'*? Jesus himself has promised to be there with us when we gather in his name. It doesn't take a sequence of authorised words, spoken by an authorised person, to make him turn up. And isn't this what the Incarnation is all about? God has come to be with his people on earth, and as his people, we are called to see Jesus in one another, and especially in the poor and needy.

So where does this leave our current practice of Eucharist? I wish I knew. Fear of transmitting a nasty virus has understandably affected our sharing of loaf and cup. But maybe we could work together to find a way of respecting the integrity of loaf and cup while participating in the eating and drinking.

And maybe we should try to restore the context of Eucharist to a real meal together with real food, always remembering to give thanks to the Father.

In my experience, God guides us at certain times by throwing everything into the air and letting us make sense of the pieces as they land. Such times are indeed opportunities for thanksgiving - or 'eucharist' if you prefer the Greek word.

Neil would welcome your comments on this article. You can contact him directly via e-mail at

neil@ourchurch.fr



ECO Northern Occitanie House Group

Janet Varty writes:

Our House Group has met twice during the summer period - at the very end of July and also on 30th August.



We met at the end of July on the medieval balcony at Nil's home. Our service included a reading from St John's Gospel Chapter 1 v 1 to 5 from The Message.

We spoke afterwards about how the different translations help or hinder our understanding. We were delighted to welcome two French (English speaking) visitors from the Alsace region who came to join us.

It was a very ecumenical afternoon as around the table we had the Church of Rome, Church of Sweden, French Evangelical and ECO Christians.

Afterwards we spent time in the galleries looking at photography, paintings, textiles and sculptures some of which spoke to the theme of war and peace. It was a very enriching afternoon.

Thanks to all who have attended and hosted our group this last year, as some of you are 'swallows' we may not see you until next year. Take care.

Words from our visitors...

"We found everything so interesting, both from a religious and linguistic point of view, and the whole experience will live long in our memories."

"We would also like to say how much we appreciated Nils' hospitality and the visit to his incredible house!"

We met again at the end of August.

We had a really uplifting worship experience in the very church-like hallway/cave in Nils' home. We sang Be Still for the Presence of the Lord to open, midway was Kum Ba Yah to the guitar and finally a happy rendering of Lord of the Dance. Thanks so much to Pat from Australia for playing the organ and the guitar.

We followed the Iona service for Justice and Peace with the Gospel reading the Parable of the Widow and the Judge. Everyone had a part in the service as it is very inclusive.

We also welcomed Jan from Perth and Linda who has recently found the ECO church online.

Afterwards we shared stories of our own different spiritual journeys. Then in memory of John, Pat's husband who loved Puy L'Eveque so much we symbolically asked God to cleanse us from our sin by washing our hands in blessed water from Lourdes. A great afternoon of people coming together to support each other in faith.

We plan to gather again on Thursday 29th September.

If you would like to join one of our Group's meetings, please e-mail

janet@ourchurch.fr



"Finally, we're still waiting for someone from last week's Parent & Toddler Group to come and claim this lost property..."

ENGLAND'S ROSE

Canon Paul Hardingham

remembers Diana, Princess of Wales



This month marks 25 years since the funeral of Princess Diana on 6th September 1997. Prince William has described how his mother's death was like an earthquake, the shockwaves taking time to sink in. When we remember the days leading up to the funeral, the whole nation seemed touched by her death. Over 32 million people watched the funeral on television. As we look back to this event, what is its continuing significance?

As those made in the image of God, we are called to reach out to show love to others.

'Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.' (1 John 4:7).

Princess Diana did this, especially the vulnerable in our society, remembering especially her work with AIDS sufferers and landmine victims. However, she was also a flawed individual, who fought various 'demons' in her own life and struggled with relationships. People identified with her humanity as one like us: fallible, weak yet more than good enough.

There is always something powerful about vulnerability in others; we can identify with them because, like us, they don't have it all together. God uses flawed people in His purposes, as we clearly see in the pages of the Bible: Abraham, Moses, David and Paul, to mention just a few!



Princess Diana had formed a friendship with Mother Teresa after the two of them met. Paul Burrell tells that the Princess had a 'spiritual awakening'. After her death, as her body lay in the French hospital, a set of rosary beads given to the Princess by Mother Teresa were placed in her hands and remained there when Prince Charles and her family came to the hospital.

Ironically, Mother Teresa died the day before Diana's funeral. Again, she was somebody who was much loved for her work among the poor. However, despite being declared a saint last year, she openly talked about the vulnerability of her faith. Mother Teresa revealed that she spent nearly 50 years without a tangible feeling of God's presence in her life! It's not easy to be a perfect saint!

'I think the biggest disease the world suffers from in this day and age is the disease of people feeling unloved.' (Princess Diana).

Church Mice

Copyright Karl A. Zorowski



Planning In-Person Worship in Alet Les Bains

Given the very difficult conditions that our farming communities have faced this year, coping with droughts and wildfires, we have decided not to hold a Harvest Festival Service this year, but rather to gather in order to give thanks for all of God's Creation and our role as stewards of it.

We are therefore planning an in-person Communion Service to be held in Alet les Bains, in **October**.

Arrangements for this have not yet been finalised but we will circulate these in our weekly update bulletin as soon as they are available. Our service will, however, be held, as is our custom, on a midweek afternoon and will then be broadcast on the following Sunday morning.

At this service we will invite donations of dried and canned food which we will pass to our brothers and sisters at Secours Catholique to use in their continuing work to help and support those in need.



2022 HAS BEEN THE SECOND HOTTEST SUMMER IN FRANCE - EVER

The French weather service Météo France has reported that this summer is the second hottest on record.

Across the summer (June, July and August), the average temperature in 2022 has been 22.67°C, compared with 23.10°C recorded during 2003.

Across our part of France, temperatures have exceeded 40°C and on 18 July, Nantes broke its all-time record when the mercury reached 42°C.

The temperature in Marseille remained above 25°C for 113 consecutive days, while Nice has recorded 60 consecutive nights when the temperature remained above 20°C.

The drought which has accompanied this heatwave is having a very serious effect on France's agriculture. The French Potato Growers' Union is expecting a shortfall of at least 20% in their harvest of 8 million tonnes of potatoes. This may well have a serious impact on a French national institution - *les frites*. In 2018, McCain reduced the length of their frites by 2cm following another harvest shortfall, and they may repeat this action in 2022.

At the same time, the *Vendange* has been moved forward by up to 3 weeks because the grapes have matured so quickly in the heat. Output is expected to be higher than in 2021, however.



The balmy month of August is behind us, and the writers of church notices pick up their pens to update their congregations. Sadly, the period of rest and tranquility might have blunted their alertness....

Announcement in the church bulletin for a National PRAYER & FASTING Conference: The cost for attending the Prayer & Fasting conference includes meals.

Report in a church magazine: Miss Charlene Mason sang I will not pass this way again, giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.

From a pew-sheet: Ladies, don't forget the jumble sale. Now's your chance to get rid of all those things not worth keeping around the house. Don't forget your husbands.

From a pew-sheet: The sermon this morning is entitled 'Jesus Walks on the Water'. The sermon tonight will be: 'Searching for Jesus'.

From a pew-sheet: Next Thursday there will be try-outs for the choir. Do go along if you can sing at all. They need all the help they can get.

From an announcement: Sadly, Barbara remains in the hospital. She is having trouble sleeping, and so has requested tapes of the vicar's sermons.

September is also the month of La Rentrée....

It was the first day of school. As the new Head made his rounds, he heard a terrible commotion coming from one of the classrooms. He rushed in and spotted one boy, taller than the others, who seemed to be making the most noise. He seized the lad, dragged him to the hall, and despite his protests, told him to wait there until he was excused.

Returning to the classroom, the Head restored order and lectured the class about the importance of good behaviour. "Now," he said, "are there any questions?"

One girl stood up timidly. "Please sir," she asked, "May we have our teacher back?"



Dustmotes Dancing In Sunbeams

The Rev Michael Burgess looks at 'Dust Motes Dancing in Sunbeams' painted by Vilhelm Hammershøi

Have you ever read a book by Robin Meyers, 'Morning Sun on a White Piano'? It is subtitled 'simple pleasures and the sacramental life.' Its theme is that we can easily pass life by, as we search for it. We shun the 'ordinary' and the simple in pursuit of more worthwhile endeavours because we equate the 'ordinary' with the mundane and unrewarding.

The Shaker melody 'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free' is the origin of the popular hymn 'The Lord of the Dance.' It says: Look closely at the simple things of life and find in them depth and divinity. The 17th century Dutch artist Vermeer created masterpieces out of the ordinary – a woman reading a letter or pouring water into a basin. Critics have described his work as 'the timeless contemplation of the ordinary.'

Over 200 years later, a Danish artist found his inspiration in that same world of the simple and the ordinary: Vilhelm Hammershøi. He lived a reclusive life in Copenhagen with his wife, painting only a few pictures a year.

Hammershøi died of throat cancer in 1916 at only 52 years. The theme of most of his paintings is limited to the world of his apartment at different times of the day and night.

His painting, 'Dust Motes Dancing in Sunbeams,' was painted in 1900. We are shown quite simply an empty room with a wall, a window, a floor and a door. There is no handle on the door. All is stillness and peace. And all is shadow until the winter sun streams into the room, catching in its rays the dust and lighting up the floor.

It is the miracle of sunlight bringing life into the stillness. An ordinary aspect of creation, but lighting up a room and bringing wonder in its wake. One critic has called it 'a hymn to an everyday marvel.'

In this and in all of his paintings, Hammershøi seems to be saying: Accept the simplicity of the present, find beauty there and live in that beauty. For him the grass is never greener in the next field – it is here and now in the world we have that we find beauty and meaning.

John Keble's hymn 'New ev'ry morning is the love' says that 'the trivial round, the common task will furnish all we need to ask.' The artist is echoing that truth on canvas, telling us that the ordinary and common things of everyday life can provide the backcloth against which we can live and act.

When we are young, that backcloth stretches out to embrace the wider world and time: it is full of potential and promise. As we grow older, that world shrinks to our home, our church, our town. If illness comes, our world may be bedroom or the hospital ward. In that smaller world life can seem trivial and ordinary.

But wherever we are, Hammershøi invites us to pause, to ponder and to find there beauty and light which will bring us 'daily nearer God.'



A self-portrait painted in 1895

Vilhelm Hammershøi was born in 1864 in Copenhagen, Denmark. The son of a merchant, Christian Hammershøi, and his wealthy wife, Frederikke (née Rentzmann), Hammershøi studied drawing from the age of eight before embarking on studies at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts.

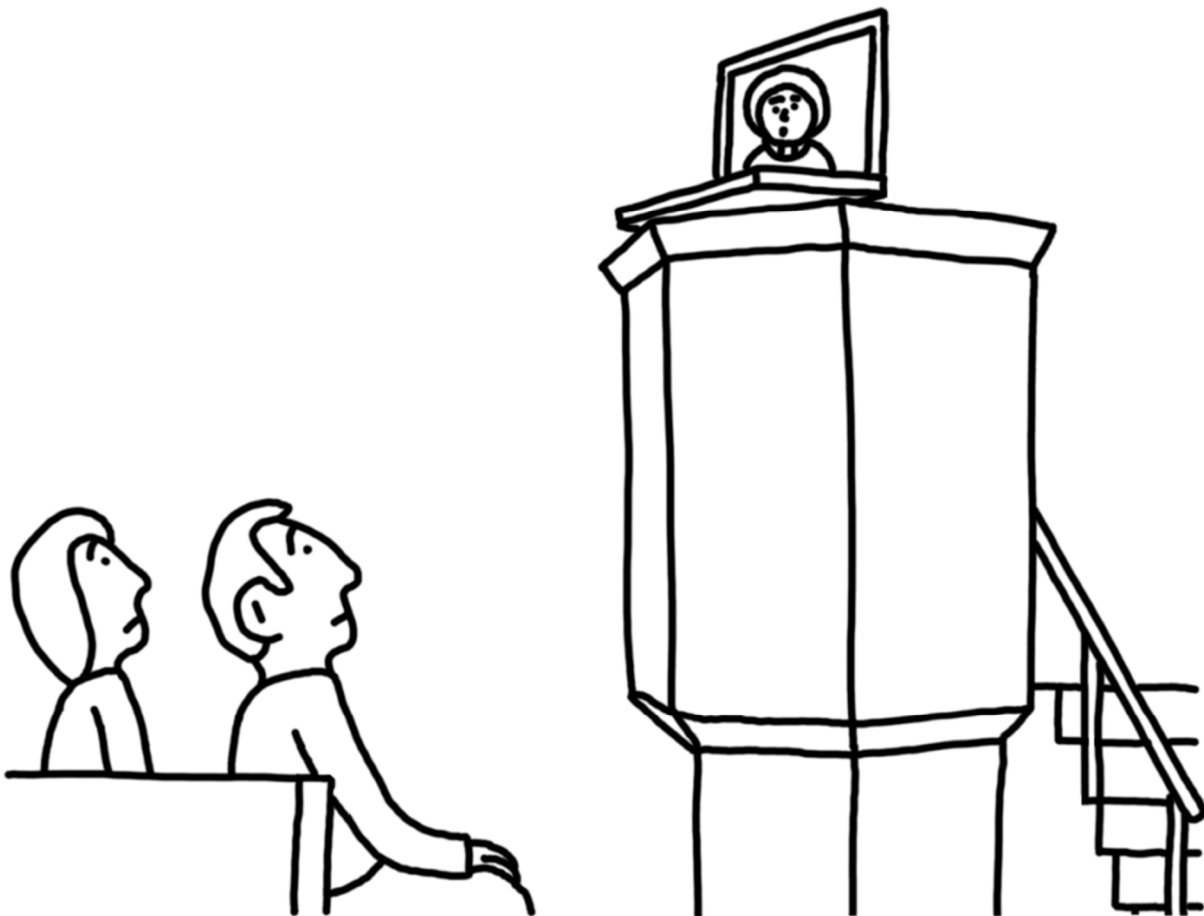
Pierre-Auguste Renoir is reported to have admired his painting. Hammershøi married Ida Ilsted in 1891.

In June 2012 at Sotheby's, one of his paintings, "Ida Reading A Letter", was sold for £1.7 million. In December 2018, another, "Interior with an Easel" was bought by the Getty Museum at Christie's for \$5 million.

ECO WORSHIP CALENDAR SEPTEMBER 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 19:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing	2	3
4 10:30 Online Communion Service	5	6 19:00 Online Service of Compline	7	8 19:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing	9	10
11 10:30 Online Morning Prayer	12	13 19:00 Online Service of Compline	14	15 19:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing	16	17
18 10:30 Online Communion Service	19	20 19:00 Online Service of Compline	21	22 19:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing	23	24
25 10:30 Online Morning Prayer	26	27 19:00 Online Service of Compline	28	29 19:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing	30	

If a church is a bit short of clergy, Dave Walker would like to suggest a way of dealing with it while also reducing the Church's carbon footprint...



Reverend Stephanie found a new way to be with each of her 9 congregations on Sundays.....