

The Church of England

Diocese of Norwich

Hazel trees for confirmation candidates

In the Diocese of Norwich, in the UK, every confirmation candidate receives a hazel tree sapling to plant. The Bishop of Norwich Graham Usher, who is also the Church of England's lead bishop on the environment, explains why.

Bishop Graham says, "This is as a symbol that being a disciple of Jesus means that our faith grows over time and part of living Jesus' life is to be stewards of creation.

"Also, because Mother Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth century mystic, held a hazel nut in the palm of her hand and three truths were revealed to her about all that God has made: 'The first is that God made it; The second is that God loves it; The third is that God looks after it', the bishops speak about this to the confirmation candidates."

What are you trying to achieve?

"To connect with our local spiritual heritage. To link the confirmation of our faith to the newness of growth spiritually. To create a memorable legacy of that act of faith by physically planting a tree. To enhance our local community with the planting of trees."

Results and Challenges

"We have delighted in the smiles on confirmation candidates' faces as the gift of a hazel tree is a surprise for them. So far over 100 candidates have been given a sapling."

One of the potential challenges was sourcing the hazel saplings, but these have been provided through links Bishop Graham had with the Forestry Commission and they were potted up and looked after in his garden.

"One of the challenges will be having any data to prove these saplings have been planted and will mature but the bishops ask the candidates to tell them about their trees when they next see the bishop who confirmed them."

What have you learned from this experience?

"We've learnt that they can be quite hard to transport if the bishop cycles to a confirmation service!"

Has the project enhanced the spiritual life of the diocese?

"This has enhanced the spiritual life in our diocese by building upon the legacy from Mother Julian's experience of God.

"It has also raised the profile of the Fifth Mark of Mission and given confirmation candidates a tangible thing to do."