

## September 2022: Beautiful churchyards

Recently I had the privilege of a personal guided tour around the churchyard of St John's Church, Bamford, looking at all the work they have been doing to enhance their churchyard as a community space. I found the result beautiful and inspiring.

Part of what I found so inspiring is St John's recognition of the churchyard as a space belonging to all: to the families visiting graves, to the people simply enjoying a quiet space, to historians and environmentalists looking for ancient and present treasures; a space inherited from former generations, shared with those for whom it is home, and held in trust for those who will come after us. Signs around the churchyard, with information and Bible verses, show how meeting all these needs is linked to our calling to serve God through one another and through care for his creation.

We began in the church porch, where swallows fly in and out feeding their young. A small baffle above the notice board and cardboard on the ground ensure mess from the nests is easy to clean up. I was reminded of how Psalm 84 tells us that in the Temple in Jerusalem swallows nested at the altar itself. St John's are currently exploring how to enable swifts to nest in their bell tower. At the front of church, where people often like to see the grass short and 'tidy,' huge numbers of snowdrops have been planted to support early pollinators. At the side of the churchyard, a bank that used to be mown short is now a mass of colourful wild flowers throughout the summer. Signs reminded me that the older graves in churchyards often support lichens and other species found hardly anywhere else, and taking decades or even centuries to grow.

Further into the churchyard, we found the area of new graves, often meticulously maintained by families. In this area, remembrance of the past and hope for the future sit side by side in the form of a belt of trees planted by the people of Bamford as part of a community project to plant one tree for every resident of Bamford, and in the form of a new hedgerow planted by the children of Bamford School. A new wild flower meadow and a pond, ensure that the sadness of death is securely held in the context of the vibrant life that is God's will for all his creation.

St John's tell me they still have much to do, but I came away feeling like I had visited a place of peace and prayer, a place where today and eternity meet, and where God's love and beauty are very evident. I know that I shall be visiting St John's churchyard again, and I pray that we may create many more such spaces across our communities.

Yours in Christ,  
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