



Ár Ghairdín Cineáltas

Creating a Calm and Sacred Space in our Schools, honouring creation and remembering Pope Francis

From the earliest times of Christianity in Ireland, sacred spaces have been central to the prayer life of the Church. Holy wells, sacred trees and special plants were as essential to early Irish Catholicism as the church buildings and formal liturgies themselves. This reflects the deep respect that the people at that time had for nature, their understanding of the intrinsic value of God's creation and their role and their position in and responsibility for it. Perhaps the early Irish Church was prophetic as it was fully in line with the teachings of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*. During penal times, the faithful turned again to this wonderful gift and created their own sacred places where Mass was celebrated at Mass rocks when Churches were closed and destroyed. This continues today with statues and shrines found throughout Ireland (*and not just in quiet rural areas*) with the appearance of religious murals and grottos in housing estates, at crossroads and by the wayside. The recent upsurge in interest in Camino pilgrimages has found fertile ground in Ireland itself with sacred prayer walks and local 'Caminos'. The word Camino simply means "The Way" and any way we can help others, regardless of age, culture or status, to experience the Peace of God in their lives must surely be the better Way.



“Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home.”

No. 4 Beatitude of Pope Francis



“Laudato Si”

In May 2015, Pope Francis published an encyclical entitled “Laudato Si” which translates as “praise be to you.” a quotation from [St. Francis of Assisi](#)’s “Canticle of the Creatures” that opens the encyclical in which the saint praises God by meditating on the goodness of sun, wind, Earth, water, and other natural forces.

Laudato Si’, Pope Francis’ encyclical, is a call to action for all people to care for our “common home,” the Earth, and to address the environmental and social crises facing humanity. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic issues, urging a shift towards an “integral ecology” that respects all of creation and promotes justice for the poor and vulnerable. The encyclical highlights the urgency of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss, while also critiquing consumerism and unsustainable development.

Now 10 years later it has become very clear through numerous “unprecedented” weather events all over the world that climate change is indeed something that can no longer be ignored. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to care for our common home. The younger generations are, unfortunately, inheriting hundreds of years of wasteful and negligent use of the earth’s natural resources. We as educators are in the blessed position of being able to instruct, guide and encourage the children in our care in how they may take action and make even small changes in how they live..

Short animated videos which summarise the aspects of environmental care being promoted through Pope Francis’ “Laudato Si” encyclical letter are available on

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3Lz7>

dmn1eM These are an excellent introduction to active environmental care for children in relation to the protection of Creation, our gift from God.

Guidelines

If you think that your school might be interested in developing its own “sacred space” the following guidelines might be of use. These are based on previous school experience and advice of school leaders. They are only guidelines, and every school is different and will have their own ideas. I am confident that your **Gairdín Cineáltais** could be established with minimal cost using innovation and existing materials.

- Remember that this is not a new initiative; rather another way to help enhance and live out the school’s ethos / philosophy
 - **Getting started:** Consider if this might be something the whole school community might buy into at this time. Might it be something that your 3rd and 4th classes could take on?
 - Identify a couple of ideas which might work with your school infrastructure / environment. Is there an existing space / planted or unused area that could become your **Gairdín Cineáltais**? Could you use old tyres, flowerpots, wheelbarrows etc. It can be as large or as small as suits each particular context?
 - Think SMART! Is it Simple, Manageable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely.
 - Begin some thinking around what skill sets might be useful and who this might involve (not forgetting parents and grandparents).
 - Encourage staff to think of their skills and talents which could contribute to the project
- Cóththáthú traschuraclaim can be well catered for through this project, incorporating Wellbeing, Geography, Science and Art as well as Religious Education.
- Consider ways of introducing this to the whole staff. It should be invitational and something that appeals to the majority of staff. It should include members of staff from across the board both teaching and non-teaching
 - At an early stage involve parents, carers, grandparents and students (including the student council if the school has one). Ownership by the whole school community is the key to success.
 - Involve the local parish through the clergy and pastoral council e.g. a short prayer service or blessing once the **Gairdín Cineáltais** is completed



Many schools already have spaces for quiet relaxation or prayer such as seen in these pictures from Bunscoil Loreto, Gorey. There are various bird boxes / bug hotels/ planters to be seen in many of your schools. Consider rededicating them.

- Be innovative, flexible and adaptive. Allow for and encourage new ideas as you go along.

D'fhéadfadh do Ghairdín Cinealtais deiseanna a chruthú chun

prayer, liturgy, healing and community outreach and parish for example:

- Creation of a May Altar, rosary walks, adoration, etc.
- A place of prayer and contemplation in an all-too busy and stressful world.
- A place to remember loved ones.
- A focal point for special liturgical events and the liturgical seasons, school assemblies, celebration of the sacraments etc.
- Community outreach-connection including collections: growing for local foodbanks involving parents/grandparents, opportunities to connect with members of local allotments, garden centres or keen gardeners in the community.
- A bridge between young people and the Church through organising harvest festival/season of creation, sharing good news during Catholic Schools' Week/Mission Sunday
- A central focus for and living out of the Beatitude: 'Blessed are those who care for God's creation'.
- A place of beauty, joy and appreciation of God's gift of creation.
- A space where those who need to may find sanctuary and relaxation



Ní neart go cur le chéile

I would like to acknowledge the co-operation and help afforded me by the Diocesan Advisors in the Diocese of Down and Connor who have been working on a similar project for a number of years..

For any further information/ help, please email me at primarydaferns@gmail.com