

Chapter Five

An Fóidín Glas

"We take these [ecosystems] into account not only to determine how best to use them, but also because they have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness. Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself."

Laudato Si' 140



An Fóidín Glas



Spreading the message - Green Sod/*An Fóidín Glas* members in a community parade.

*Green Sod Ireland/*An Fóidín Glas**

The Sisters of Mercy, who have been many years in education, recognised how important it is in promoting and encouraging public awareness of the necessity of conserving land and protecting biodiversity for the sake of future generations of all species.

In recent times, an awakening has been taking place regarding our role in the life of planet earth. We have learned how we humans and millions of other-than-human species evolved over 14 billion years. However, the relationship we have had with Earth was essentially human centred and, while laudable, was lacking in concern for other forms of life on our home planet. It was only with the disappearance of some forms of life that we became aware of the intrinsic value of nature, regardless of its value in relation to us.

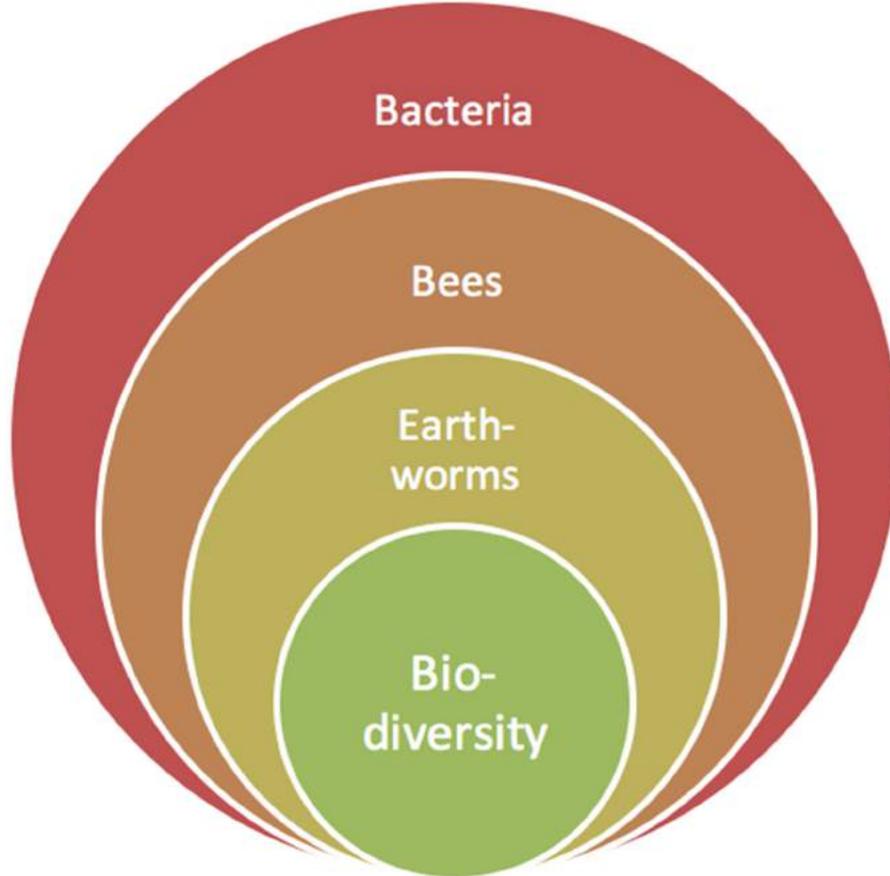
Máirín Ní Mhurchú explains the origin of *An Fóidín Glas*: *“Back in the late nineties I was looking for a name or title that would be an umbrella for any kind of earth-centred project in which I might engage. Goretti Feeney came up with An Fóidín Glas (The Little Green Sod) which I loved because I thought that organic growing might be a possibility. A request from a teacher in a very small school near Crossmolina to ‘do’ something with the children brought me on a totally different path. I remembered Thomas Berry’s command/appeal to tell the story and so I began – and it took time – to develop a version of the Universe Story that would be suitable for primary schools. I was fortunate to meet up with Sharon Cameron, newly appointed Environmental Awareness Officer with Mayo County Council, who was then promoting the Green Schools Programme throughout the county. She supported and sponsored me down the years. When filling out necessary forms for the County Council, Eco-Literacy best described what I was doing in schools.*

When two visionary and pioneering women (one of them a friend of mine) set up a land trust (Green Sod Ireland) in 2007 and were looking for an Irish translation, it seemed appropriate to offer them ‘my’ Fóidín Glas. Goretti Feeney gave her blessing to the transfer. In 2014, I felt the need to re-imagine my approach to working in schools. To give me space and time to experiment I terminated my partnership with Mayo County Council. Since then I have been a volunteer under the Green Sod Ireland/ An Fóidín Glas Education Programme. There is now a sense of having come ‘full circle’ back to An Fóidín Glas.”

In 2008, when biodiversity became a Green Flag theme, Máirín developed *The Food We Eat Programme*. This illustrates our dependence on biodiversity, which is in essence, the variety of life on planet Earth. Special emphasis is given to bees, earthworms and bacteria because they are essential for the growing of food.

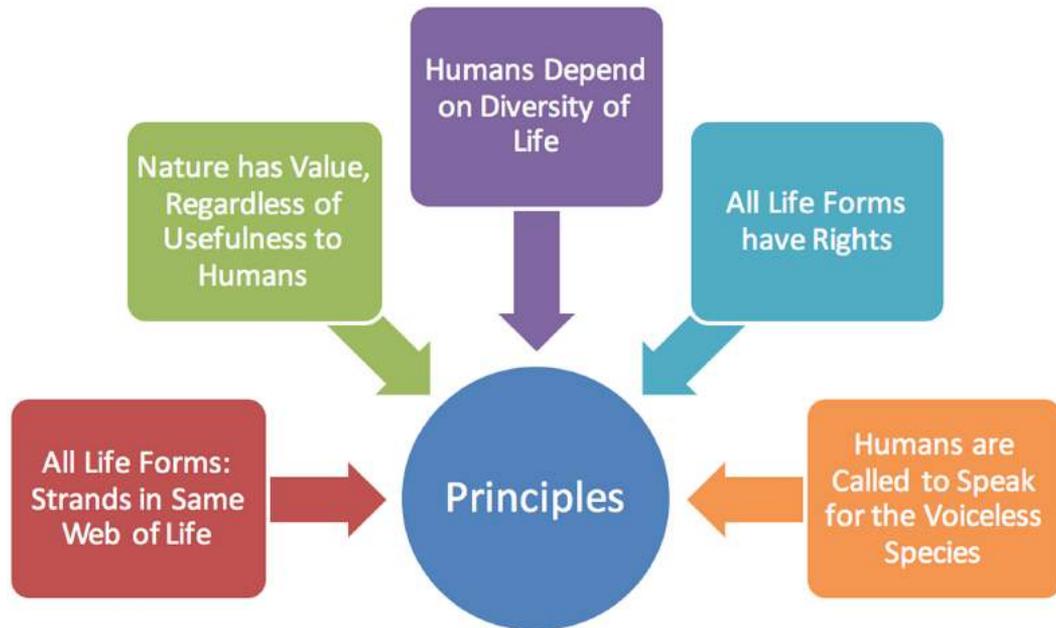
This programme includes preparing soup *from scratch* in the classroom, learning the principles and practice of organic growing, composting and creating a web of life telling the story of creation. One teacher contrasted an initial reluctance to even consider eating homemade soup in a class, to the sheer delight of the pupils as they queued up for second helpings. This programme has been taken up by 140 schools in Mayo, with requests for repeat sessions over the years.

Since 2014, Máirín has been updating the above programmes working now as a *Green Sod Ireland/An Fóidín Glas* volunteer. Her hope is to keep the story of the universe/ biodiversity as a core theme. Máirín now goes to fewer schools, preferring to spend more time in each one, as she develops a broader presentation. She offers modules that can be chosen by schools, e.g. organic growing, biodiversity and food, all through the medium of songs, poems, etc. She combines an enactment of the Universe Story



with engagement of the children in reflection on the Web of Life, through learning where food comes from. Ever creative, Máirín has written lively lyrics to songs that tell the stages of the Universe Story and has put them to traditional Irish airs. They may be heard by linking to <http://www.greensodireland.ie/education.php>

In each programme and session, emphasis on the following themes and principles is made:



We may note that the recognition of nature having a value in itself predates such an understanding in *Laudato Si'*!



Máirín has also brought her programme to the Mercy community in Árd Bhríde, Castlebar, Ireland.

Máirín Ní Mhurchú

