



## Green Pilgrimage Network



*A handbook for pilgrim places throughout the  
Catholic world*

**ARC**

ALLIANCE OF RELIGIONS AND CONSERVATION

launched in 1995 by HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh KG KT

## INTRODUCTION TO THE GREEN PILGRIMAGE NETWORK

At least 220 million people become pilgrims each year – whether for a few hours, days, weeks or months. Many are Catholic: every year around 20 million pilgrims visit Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico; around 10 million offer prayers at the Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida in Brazil; and Fatima in Portugal, Lourdes in France and the Jasna Gora Catholic monastery in Poland each see about four million pilgrim visitors.

And as the world's population expands, so does the environmental pressure on pilgrimage places.

The international Green Pilgrimage Network (GPN) was created, and launched in Assisi, Italy, in November 2011, by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) with nine founding pilgrimage places from Europe, Africa and Asia.

Assisi is, of course, the birthplace of St Francis, the Catholic friar who believed God is present in all His creation and that we are duty bound to show kindness and respect in our treatment of the natural world. He founded the Franciscan Order and today is the patron saint of the environment. Assisi is a major site of pilgrimage for Catholics, and the city of Assisi and the Assisi Franciscan Order were founding members of the GPN.

The vision of the GPN is of pilgrims, and pilgrim places, becoming models of care for the environment, and leaving a positive footprint on this earth.

This short booklet has been designed for Catholic cities, towns, villages, pilgrims and shrines, to help them:

- Create a network of sustainable and earth-friendly pilgrim sites across the Catholic world
- Join an existing network of international member cities
- Create a theological basis for green pilgrimage
- Encourage Catholics to work with government agencies, NGOs and private companies to make their holy places more eco-friendly
- Create plans for promoting sustainability and care for the earth
- Share stories, wisdom and tradition
- Ask pilgrims to walk lightly and travel responsibly in the spirit of Christ
- Inspire pilgrim sites to green their religious festivals
- Share these plans to celebrate how in the future the holiest cities CAN be the cleanest, greenest cities

This short booklet has been designed for the Rio organisers of World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, but can be adapted for all Catholic pilgrimage cities, towns, villages, as well as pilgrims and Catholic leaders and lay organisers around the world.

## *Part One:*

### *The Process of Greening Pilgrimage*

#### ***A. Living and Sharing our Theology of Caring for the Earth***

Many people recognise that the environmental crisis is in many ways a spiritual issue, and that therefore its solution can only be found through exploring the root causes of this degradation. This can best be done by fostering an ethos of compassion and care for the natural world. While many wish to legislate our way out of these crises, the religions wish to guide by example and mindfulness, rooted in their experience down the centuries.

#### ***B. Developing a vision***

Share our vision of pilgrims and the pilgrim cities that receive them becoming models of care for the environment, and leaving a positive footprint on the Earth. Or adapt it for your own use.

#### ***C. Making a Commitment***

Make a commitment to green your pilgrimage site by signing the Green Pilgrimage Network Vision Statement (at the end of this document). Do it with publicity and celebration, and let people know that you have done it.

#### ***D. Reviewing Current Practices***

It is vital to look at (i.e. environmentally audit) your buildings, land, places of worship and practices at an early stage to give a clear idea of what religious leaders and government authorities are already doing, and to indicate where you could have a more positive impact.

#### ***E. Building a team and partnerships***

Review who, in the local government, religious leadership, businesses, sciences, NGOs, schools, media etc can help you make the environment better: and recruit them. Sometimes the most surprising people are willing to become partners: they find that it is good for their ethos, their image, and their reputation as a good place to do business with and work at. Supermarkets, hotels, radio stations, newspapers, banks and others can all be potential partners.

#### ***F. Creating a strategic plan***

Without a clear plan, many great ideas come to very little. This booklet is designed to help you think through a plan. And when you have done it, and had it agreed by stakeholders, then post it everywhere, and let people know. And of course, follow it.

*"The gravity of the ecological situation reveals how deep is the human moral crisis"*  
***Pope John Paul II, message for World Peace Day in 1990.***

*Care of water resources and attention to climate change are matters of grave importance for the entire human family,"*  
***Pope Benedict XVI, St Peter's Square, September 5, 2007.***

## *Part Two:*

### *Seven key areas to make your pilgrimage site greener*

#### **1. Waste**

With more and more pilgrims visiting religious sites, enormous levels of waste are being generated. Lack of adequate sanitation also leads to dangerous levels of waste.

Think what your church, city or religious site would look like free of waste. Could you encourage pilgrims to pick up rubbish as they go?

Clean-ups could be encouraged by funding rubbish bins along the route, with beautifully written notices about how pilgrims should not only clear their own rubbish but also clear after others less thoughtful than they are. Could the local authorities work to encourage this, and advertise it?

Changing the waste situation of a whole city before June might be daunting, but there are still some things that you can do.

#### ***Current examples***

At the Maukib Muslim pilgrimage in Kano, Nigeria, attracting 2 million pilgrims over a week, tonnes of polybags (for drinking water) are thrown on the side of the road. The Qadiriyyah Movement set up a system to encourage school pupils to collect the bags (and get academic points for it) and then use the bags to grow seedlings.

Ireland launched a scheme to charge 15 cents per plastic bag. Previously 1.2 billion plastic bags were being handed out each year. This was cut by 90 percent. Could Rio do this?

Ludhiana in Punjab has banned plastic bags less than 30 microns. Lighter bags break more easily while better bags are more expensive, and will probably be recycled. Bags must be made of virgin plastic, without colours, and printed with the manufacturer's name.

#### ***What you could do:***

- Put up signs to encourage pilgrims not to drop their litter and leave the place CLEANER than when they arrived
- Provide composting and recycling initiatives around your religious site
- Work with local businesses to stop them using plastic bags
- Carry reusable water bottles with you that you can refill
- Install water fountains around the city
- Ensure there are enough toilets for pilgrims and that they are cleaned regularly: can they be bio toilets, not only better for the environment, but generating energy?
- Educate pilgrims on the need to keep the pilgrim town clean and green
- Form partnerships with local NGOs or municipalities to actively reduce litter and waste
- Take interest in sewage. Where is it going? What is it affecting?

## 2 Celebration

World Youth Day will bring around three million extra pilgrims to Rio. Are we doing all we can to ensure it is an environmentally friendly celebration?

### ***Current examples:***

- The Bhumi Project in the UK has created a list of minimum environmental standards for any Hindu Festival. It has suggestions for catering, waste, travel, etc, when planning a large event. Religious festivals are opportunities to offer homegrown produce at the temple and it recommends devotees bring their own plates or insist on biodegradable plates, cups and spoons.
- March 14th was celebrated for the first time in 2011 as Sikh Environment Day. Some 450 schools and gurdwaras led the celebration. Gurbanis (hymns) celebrating nature were sung in the gurdwaras and on Sikh radio that day. Eco notice boards were set up in gurdwaras, saplings were given as offerings, lectures were arranged, clean-ups organised, and many people went to the countryside or parks to share their experience of nature. In 2012 more than 1,000 joined in.

### ***What you could do:***

- Limit noise, lights and traffic around environmentally sensitive areas
- Have a vegetarian day on one of the days, teaching how this is not a fast, but a feast to celebrate what nature and God provides
- Can some of the young people do service in the local community to create gardens, clear litter or engage in other green ways with protecting the city as part of their pilgrimage?
- Have an Earth Hour, during the celebration, in which lights are switched off and candles lit
- Incorporate fun “think tank” sessions in festivals which young people are guided to think about how Rio is taking steps to protect their environment, and also create their own plans about what they can do to protect the environment at home. Makes this a celebration of empowerment, and let the young people be empowered to help God’s creation in their own ways.

### ***After Rio:***

- Celebrate St Francis Day, October 4, as an environmental celebration every year
- Follow up with the students when they return home and ask for their help to make the next World Youth Day an even greener occasion.

Festivals do not have to be faith festivals to benefit from the spirit of environmentalism – the same thing applies to all festivals, conferences, exhibitions and any events, secular or religious. Young people in particular want green events, and according to research done at music festivals, many would pay extra if the event were green. It can save money, through using renewable transport and recycling resources, and it can really create company and organisational loyalty to let this happen.

### 3. Accommodation

Wherever there are pilgrims, there are places for them to stay. For example, the Catholic charity Caritas runs many hotels for Catholics and others to stay, as well as welcoming businesspeople and wealthier people to other hotels where profits go to compassionate programmes.

Here are some questions to ask:

- Is the accommodation as kind as possible to the environment and community?
- Are the cleaning chemicals gentle?
- Does the hotel/hostel compost, recycle, employ people fairly?
- Does it source ethical/organic/local breakfast and food ingredients?
- Are all eggs free-range?
- Are new buildings planned to have a minimal environmental footprint?
- Is toilet paper (where relevant) recycled or FSC-certified on principle?
- If there are gardens, are they maintained to take care of wild animals and insects?
- Is the furniture environmentally sourced?
- Does the company doing the laundry have a sustainable ethos?
- Is there a sign in the room giving an option to have linen and towels washed?
- Have they shampoo/soap from dispensers rather than throwaway bottles?
- Is there a mechanism to switch off aircon/heat when there is no-one in the room?
- Is the lighting energy-saving?
- Does the hotel use green energy?
- Does the hotel provide a walking, bike and public transport guide to the city?
- Does it call itself an “eco” hotel?
- And does it tell guests about what it does, and why it is faith-consistent to do so?

The Methodist International Centre (MIC), a four-star hotel in London has won the first ethical hotel mark in the UK. It offers seasonal, local produce, uses eco-responsible cleaning and catering standards and has a waste disposal policy that almost everything is composted or recycled. And all eggs are free-range. It has not cost much more, and involved an internal audit which left many staff much happier.

Etchmiadzin in Armenia is setting up a network of bed & breakfast places, to provide lodging in people’s homes, generating income for local people and promoting green values amongst Armenian Orthodox pilgrims.

The National Centre of Pilgrimage at Trondheim in Norway will award green cafés, food outlets and accommodation along the routes the [Eco-Lighthouse](#) accreditation.

If you recommend non faith accommodation on your website or at your own hostels when they are full, could you create a category for “Recommended green places to stay?” If you contact the managers to ask them about how environmental they are, you might be surprised at the positive stories you hear.

Use your leverage: where otherwise good hotels have no green record you might be able to ask them to do an ecological audit, on the understanding that once they have done this, you will be able to recommend them to pilgrims. Sometimes even big chain hotels can see the immediate advantage of improving their footprint, if they will attract more guests.

## 4. Food

With up to 30 percent of an individual's carbon footprint coming from food, this is the most important everyday way for people to reduce their environmental impact. The Soil Association (the UK's leading organic certifier), suggests the 70-50-30-100 principle as a realistic aim, whether in teashops, restaurants, school meals or homes. Food should be at least:

**70 percent fresh or unprocessed  
50 percent local, and  
30 percent organic, with  
100 percent free-range eggs**

### ***Current examples:***

In the Friends House in London, which houses the Quakers central offices, the café uses only free range eggs, and is gradually implementing a strict food sourcing policy.

In Etchmiadzin, Armenia, there is a canteen for pilgrims, with simple, local food using old Armenian recipes. The 70-50-30-100 standards apply.

Holland House is a Christian retreat centre in rural Worcestershire, UK. In 2007 its new director decided to take steps to go green. In May 2011 Holland House came first out of 33 in the Community category of the UK-based Footsteps Award and was the only faith nomination.

In 2008 the Church of South India's Christian Women's Fellowship in Kottayam, Kerala, set up a snack centre. It was the first outlet in Kottayam to run on biogas. At around US \$1,000 the set up costs were high but within a year they had saved that from reduced fuel bills.

### ***What you could do:***

- Can you introduce the 70-50-30-100 standard in all the pilgrim hostelries? And can you, at the same time, tell pilgrims what it is, what it benefits, and why it would be good for God's earth and creatures if they followed this guideline at home?
- Could the city award green stars (or similar) to places that promote green eating and standards?
- Could you promote green energy in faith-owned restaurants and cafes through biogas, solar, etc? Green energy is about faithfully not wasting resources. It can also save money.
- Can you work with private businesses to make food packaging more compatible with faith beliefs about caring for nature?
- Can you ask people not to drink water from plastic bottles? Can you recommend pilgrims to carry a reusable metal water bottle, and make sure there is clean, free, drinking water provided for them?
- Could Catholic leaders encourage followers to cut meat consumption? This would reduce pressure on natural habitats, reduce pollution and help combat climate change. Could World Youth Day be a vegetarian festival? Or at least have one day of no meat or fish?

## 5. Transport and Energy

Both transport and energy use have a high carbon footprint and careful consideration should be given to how pilgrims will arrive and travel round during World Youth Day. Could your city encourage carbon-neutral travel through outreach, travel agencies, tour groups or tour leaders? Could you work with the local authority and local environmental NGOs to improve the green transport network?

For city administrations, is it possible to restrict motorised vehicles from certain areas? Are there adequate parking facilities in the outskirts of your city in order to reduce the adverse effect of pollution from vehicular emission? Could you discuss this with the local authorities?

### ***Current examples:***

The Vatican in 2008 installed solar energy panels on its roof. They provide around 20% of all energy needed in the Vatican. Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo, President of the Governatorate of Vatican City State, said solar energy had “unlimited possibilities” and was hugely important in the face of climate change which was not only a problem of ecology but “impacts international justice and peace”.

Jerusalem is outlawing vehicles in the old city and has opened a new light rail system to help the environment and make the pilgrim experience more pleasant.

Sustrans is a UK NGO promoting and creating cycle paths around the UK. At the pilgrim city of St Albans Sustrans helped create the St Albans trail from a former railway track. At Canterbury they have developed a cycling programme connecting the city to the rest of Kent. What could your city do?

### ***What you could do:***

- Encourage the city to introduce mandatory environmental labeling for all new vehicles, with the aim of doubling fuel efficiency within a decade, and petition them to replace diesel-powered buses with buses powered by hydrogen fuel cell
- Work with rail and coach companies to promote pilgrim rail- and bus-passes and encourage pilgrims to arrive overland on public transport.
- Reduce the use of on-site vehicles in any events organised by the city, and when they are necessary use electric or bio-diesel powered vehicles.
- Consider using shuttle buses powered by green energy.
- Provide maps and information for pilgrims to help them use public transport.
- Encourage pilgrims to plant a tree before they travel, to help them be mindful of their carbon footprint, and to look after it carefully when they return
- Can your religious buildings or their offices install solar panels or other renewable energy sources? Can this be part of the thinking for all new buildings?
- Can pilgrims be encouraged to think about energy, as they light candles?



## 6. Wildlife and forests

The greatest rainforest in the world is in Catholic countries, and Catholicism is uniquely empowered to take steps to protect it. As wild natural places become more accessible with improved infrastructure, millions of people are now visiting these once remote, fragile areas. As such, pilgrimage and tourism are putting increasing pressure on South America's natural landscapes and its wildlife.

We can help reduce the pressures that threaten wildlife and forests by directing our prayers to them and by increasing the awareness in our communities about the connection between our faith and nature protection.

### ***Current Examples***

Many churches in Mexico have a tradition of decorating the churches with rare orchids from the forests. The Sacred Orchids project by the local NGO, Pronatura Chiapas AC works with villagers in Chiapas State to create sustainable management programmes for bromeliads, palms, cycads and orchids. It involves liaising with the indigenous communities which harvest these wild plants, and with churches in Mexico and around the world where many of these plants tend to end up.

In 2002 Conservation International forged a partnership with the Catholic Church in Colombia to save two species on the verge of extinction – the yellow-eared parrot and the Quindio wax palm. "The goal was to end the use of millions of wax palm fronds in Palm Sunday services here and in the United States, a practice that was killing the trees and destroying the parrots' sole habitat." When the word got out, people turned to ordinary palms rather than rare ones and priests organized blessings of seedlings in nurseries. By 2007 the yellow eared parrot population was 660 – an increase from 81 in 2002.

### ***What you could do:***

- Find out what rare species there are in your area. What can your congregations and pilgrims do to protect them? Organise a meeting to discuss.
- What palms do you use for Palm Sunday? Spread the message to source them sustainably
- Make sure that there are systems in place for trash disposal in forest areas near churches so they are not littered with plastic and other waste. Put in place a ban on plastic bottles and bags while on pilgrimage. Create a sacred place for puja waste.
- Exercise stronger, more visible and practical leadership in response to the wildlife crisis by spreading these messages within the community and beyond;
- Deepen engagement and collaboration with other Catholic leaders and communities as well as with government representatives, and conservationists to develop creative solutions to safeguard and honour wildlife and the natural world;
- Make sure that flowers at churches and festivals do not use rare plants, and create sustainable nursery projects to provide these flowers
- Green a space beside your church and manage religious lands more ecologically.
- Teach pilgrims not only to plant trees as part of their pilgrimage, but to care for them when they return home.

## 7. Education and awareness

Central to ensuring our religious sites are environmentally friendly is the ability to share our message effectively. Without awareness, green plans will not realise their full potential. So whatever you decide to do, tell people about it. This is not just about launching programmes, but about sustaining them in the long term, so your pilgrimage town or city becomes a living lesson and example of how to respond to the environmental crisis.

### A. School curricula

Can you include teachings about green pilgrimage in the school curriculum in your pilgrim cities? Can you have vegetable patches where pupils grow food and herbs? Do you promote food grown without pesticides? Or go into nature to paint and study birds and wild plants?

#### *Current examples:*

- The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has pledged to develop: "a sense of awe and wonder for creation in our young people through all subjects and ground them in a spiritual awareness of the need to care for Creation".

### B. Informal education and youth camps

Often young people learn their most important lessons out of the classroom. Do you have religious youth organisations where environmental ideas could be integrated e.g. through running youth camps in nature and organising street cleaning projects?

#### *Current examples:*

- In 2011 the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana announced it would form eco-clubs in all its schools. This includes learning farming and gardening techniques, protecting trees and understanding climate change. Prizes will be given to schools with the best-performing clubs.
- Writhlington School in the UK – a staterun school in a relatively poor area of Somerset - set up an orchid club 10 years ago. Today they are one of the leading growers of orchids in the UK; each year students visit countries like Brazil, or Cambodia, to help people set up their own sustainable orchid businesses. It has helped them develop gardening skills, business skills, and knowledge of the world. It has been self-supporting.

#### *What you could do:*

- Hold a State-wide Eco competition for school pupils. Make categories for poems, flash fiction, slogans, short stories. Or ask them simply to write about "How my friends and I set up an environment project in my city. And the difference we made. Get local sponsors to give prizes like bicycles or running shoes, or money to set up eco-clubs. Be creative.
- Get the city to take an active role in promoting the environment in its schools. And make the lessons varied and exciting
- Set up eco clubs, and make them places where young entrepreneurs can learn their trade, and where business experts help them upgrade their ideas, and make them sustainable and profitable and ethical.
- Hold workshops at the World Youth Day Congress to show young people how to work with teachers and stakeholders to set up their own, attractive, fun, eco-clubs

## *Part Four: Media and engagement: communicating the message*

How might you best engage with the local and national media? How can you pass on the message again and again, in different ways, that a dedicated pilgrim must prepare mindfully for pilgrimage and behave in a way that cares for the environment? Do local newsletters, radios, newspapers, TV stations, websites, etc, have special sections on ecology? Can you ask them to? Could your website have special sections, blog, picture galleries, etc, on the development of your Green Pilgrim City? Is there a special Catholic radio station to bring on board?

This is about creating an ethos of environmental action, and of people of all ages and all wakes of life being empowered to feel that they can make a difference, and to be proud that their town or city is greener because it is sacred.

### ***Current examples:***

- Kano City in Nigeria is establishing a Green FM Radio Station, involving local artists in mass media environmental campaigns, and will introduce mobile public film shows about nature and environmental issues.
- The Armenian Orthodox Church runs the Shoghakat TV Company in Armenia that in 2010 launched the Green Theology project to broadcast environmental programmes.
- In 2007 WWF in Australia invited people in Sydney to switch off their lights and appliances for one hour, which they called Earth Hour. More than 2,000 businesses and 2.2 million people participated as a result of awareness-raising and media involvement.

### ***What you could do:***

- Create a logo and posters and banners. Use the GPN logo, or adapt it for your own needs.
- Develop a marketing campaign that promotes the green pilgrim City concept, incorporating sustainable travel as well as promoting local heritage and cottage industries.
- Prepare a green pilgrim map of your city (on eco-friendly paper) finding green hotels and restaurants etc that could advertise on it. This could be self-financing or even profitable.
- Talk to the media. What do they need to get a story out of this? Can they do a series of features? A campaign? A column? A regular Green Pilgrimage City blog?

## **Part Five The Green Pilgrimage Network vision**

*The vision of the Green Pilgrimage Network is of pilgrims, and the pilgrim cities and places that receive them, becoming models of care for the environment and leaving a positive footprint on this earth.*

*We, the members of the Green Pilgrimage Network support this vision, and commit to create an action plan to transform our pilgrim city, place or route into a green, sustainable model in keeping with the beliefs of our faith or the faiths of our pilgrimage place.*

*This action plan will be the roadmap for improving the environmental impacts of pilgrimage in our pilgrimage cities, sites and routes.*

*Each of us also commits to bring faith and secular groups together to work in partnership towards this vision.*

*We pledge to promote this in the local media, and we will work with visiting pilgrims to make their journeys as environmentally friendly as possible. We will do this through greening our transport, accommodation, festivals, food, water supply, waste, sanitation and wild places, as well as encouraging environmental education, parks and wildlife protection for and by local residents.*

*We also pledge to support and help each other, to report on our progress regularly, and to promote green pilgrimage ideas where we can.*

## **Part Six: Resources**

- **International GPN Handbook:** <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=521>
- **GPN Logo:** <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=543>
- **UNDP booklet on shifting to low carbon lifestyles:** <http://tinyurl.com/bcomcpy>
- **Catholic Theology of the Environment:** <http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.asp?pageID=95>
- **Catholics' Pledge to St Francis:** <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=416>
- **Catholic Climate Covenant:** <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>
- **Pronatura Chiapas:** <http://www.pronatura.org.mx/>
- **Assisi as a Green Pilgrim City:** <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=544>
- **Benedictine Handbook (in Portuguese):** <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=347>
- **ICLEI** is an international association of local governments and associations that have made a commitment to sustainable development. <http://www.iclei.org>
- **Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC):** ARC was formed in 1995. We facilitate partnerships between faith and environmental groups in order to trigger long-term environmental action by faiths and raise awareness about the role faiths can play. [www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org)

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