



RETREAT CENTRES OFFER VISITORS AND GUESTS MOMENTS OF STUDY AND CONTEMPLATION, AND A TIME TO THINK ABOUT FORGING A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH CREATION



TOP AND FRONT: EMMAUS HOUSE IN BRISTOL
BELOW: THE WILD SETTING OF LEE ABBEY IN DEVON.
RIGHT: MANY CENTRES ALREADY RAISE THEIR OWN PIGS AND HENS

A register for faith eco retreat centres

This network is linking with WWF, the Soil Association and others in order to plan and create an eco-register for faith-based retreat centres and their respective Sacred Protected Environments around the world, setting standards for purchasing, building, heating and catering. Please contact us if you have any ideas or advice for setting up this register.

Making changes not just for years but for generations

In November 2009, at a major event at Windsor Castle, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) and the UNDP celebrated the launch of detailed commitments by faith communities around the world to make long-term plans to care for nature and to respond to the pressing issues created by climate change. The plans, by 30 traditions in nine faiths were launched by HRH Prince Philip and HE Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-general of the United Nations.

The plans each involved making a commitment to spend time - five, seven, eight or nine years depending on the religion's preference - putting into place policies, protocols and simple regular practices which will protect the environment for many generations to come. If you are part of a faith community why don't you join us by creating your own long-term plan to protect the living planet? Full details, and a practical guidebook to making your own plan can be found on our website www.arcworld.org. The retreat centre network is part of this wider initiative.



A NEW ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK FOR FAITH RETREATS



Climate change is just a symptom of a broken relationship with Creation. It brings us back to the world's spiritual teachings... which are about forging the right relationship with Creation.

ARC: THE ALLIANCE OF RELIGIONS AND CONSERVATION



ALLIANCE OF RELIGIONS AND CONSERVATION
launched in 1995 by HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh KG KCT

To sign up for the Eco Retreat Centre newsletter and network, or to learn about the long-term plans for generational change, see our website or contact us :

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In Autumn 2008, THE ALLIANCE OF RELIGIONS AND CONSERVATION (ARC) contacted 200 faith-based Retreat Centres in the UK, to ask if they would like to form an informal network to discuss ecological issues through a regular newsletter. The response has been encouraging. Many centres are going along similar paths and facing similar issues, but there has never before been a network enabling them to learn from each other's creative ideas about how to tread more softly on the earth. Key areas are:

1. Buildings and infrastructure

Many retreat centres are looking to reduce the carbon footprint of their buildings, through solar, wind, geothermal, biomass boilers and other alternatives. The choices, implications and costs can be daunting, and the network is helpful in getting people to compare information. Lee Abbey, in the Exmoor National Park, is installing a hydro-electric plant which will be a model for many of its neighbouring businesses in the Park. Mill House in Devon installed a reed bed system to help it process grey water outflow from baths, showers and the kitchen sink. It cost around £10,000, but Mill House believes it will pay for itself in less than ten years, while decreasing the use of damaging chemical processes.

2. Education

At their General Assembly in 2006, the La Re traite Sisters chose “to encourage greater respect for the earth and a commitment to the sharing of its resources”. One of the educational programmes of their urban Bristol retreat centre, Emmaus House involved inviting 10 year olds from a local primary school to celebrate Creation for a day, along the retreat centre model. They started in the Meditation Room “because kids love silence” and then explored the five different gardens. Each child was invited to bring something from the garden into the house. At the end of the day, the children prayed and several, unprompted, gave thanks for their stone or flower or snail, which they themselves had named.

3. Pastoral care and wisdom

People often go to faith centres when they are at their most vulnerable, or at least most open to change in their lives. Sometimes it is working in the gardens or in the kitchens that can be life-changing, as at Minsteracres in County Durham, where refugees and people with

learning difficulties come from Newcastle to develop fruit and vegetable gardens; sometimes centres simply offer the chance to think, undisturbed, about life and the wonder of creation. As a result of the newsletters some centres have increased their meditation materials about nature and the environment, and are promoting their green ideas on their website and in their buildings.

4. Simpler living

Many retreat centres raise chickens and pigs, and have kitchen gardens to grow much of their food. The Soil Association's 70-50-30 guidelines, that food should be 70 percent fresh, 50 percent local and 30 percent organic, have been useful. The issue that many centres realise they are facing is over-supplying: providing guests with too much meat, which is often wasted. Three years ago a guest asked the Methodist International Centre (MIC) in London whether their eggs were free-range. The immediate answer was “no”, that it was too expensive. But the question came before the MIC Board, which decided that kindness in sourcing should be part of its ethos.

5. Media and advocacy

Many centres have been models of environmental care for years, but have not been telling anyone about it. We hope, through this initiative, to help such centres think through how they can use their own networks. This leaflet, for example, happened because Jeff Witts, formerly of Morley House, said he wanted to advertise the newsletter more widely through the Archway Wardens Conference.

5. Networks and partnerships

In its first month, the newsletter reversed the Carbon Trust's policy to exclude small religious-run organisations from the list of groups qualified to apply for zero interest loans. There will, no doubt, be many other benefits to this informal network: if you're not on it already, **please write to arcworld@arcworld.org** to join the list.

6. Celebrations

The Franciscan Hillfield Peace and Environment Project in Dorset, location of an important wildflower meadow, celebrates nature through rogation prayers, open days, prayers, homegrown organic food, and by filling the chapel and friary with cut flowers grown specially to celebrate the sacred elements of a right relationship with Creation.



“The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth's treasures no longer serve to build God's garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction. .”

Pope Benedict XVI at his Mass of Inauguration in 2005.

