

Alliance of Religions and Conservation: Educational resource 1ci

Achievements and Actions: Sacred Gifts – Important actions by faith groups to address environmental issues since the Assisi Declarations, 1986

While it is important to be clear about the theological reasons directing religions to care for the environment, it is crucial that this leads to effective action to address the issues at every level, from the domestic to the international.

Since the beginning of the Religions and Conservation initiative in 1986, hundreds of thousands of environmental projects of all sizes have been carried out by individuals, communities and organisations in the name of their religion, with many still ongoing and new ones being launched every year.

Every religion believes that the gift of life itself is sacred: we do not own it, but we have responsibility to care for it. It was this shared understanding that led WWF and ARC to create a special term of praise and recognition for major significant new projects launched by the World's religions at a meeting in Kathmandu in 2000.

"Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet" highlights both the theology and the practice of caring for the environment which every single major religion now advocates and undertakes. The first 26 gifts were recognised internationally in November 2000 and a further 14 in November 2002. The table below gives a brief outline of the gifts:

No.	Religion	Place	Gift	nature of project
1	Bahatism	Indore, India	Barli Development Project for Rural Women	Training in literacy, agriculture, health. Income generating skills to provide for family & use of solar-powered cookers.
2	Buddhism	Cambodia	Miup Baltong - Green Shade Movement	Using pagodas as centres for environmental monitoring and teaching new sustainable ways.

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3	Buddhism	Mongolia	Hunting and logging bans, sacred reserves	Mongolian Buddhist reintroduced a 2000 year old ban on hunting and 'resacralised' seven nature reserves.
4	Maronite (Christian)	Lebanon	Pledge to preserve Harissa Forest	In the face of increasing development the Maronite Church has pledged to preserve the forest it owns, thus encouraging others to do likewise.
5	Church of Sweden (Christian)	Sweden	Certified 100,000 hectares of forest as sustainably managed.	Originally planned to certify 15% of their forests but actually achieved 25%. Also promoted Parish Environmental Diploma scheme for auditing resource usage.
6	Church of England (Christian)	UK	National environmental network established	Church of England has linked 5,000 parishes into a 'Parish Pump' network to promote environmental awareness and action.
7	Catholic (Christian)	Canada & USA	Defence of Columbia River	Bishops lead campaign to protect 1,200-mile river from pollution and loss of habitat, resulting in five-year conservation strategy.
8.	Batak (Christian)	Indonesia	Create major programme of environmental action	Church appointed environmental officer, campaigns against pollution of lake, protects National Parks, repairs deforestation and runs large education programme.
9.	Christian (Catholic)	UK	Abandoned monastery revived	The abandoned monastery of St Francis in Gorton, Manchester, is being refurbished to offer a community health centre and an environmentally friendly hotel and conference centre.

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10	Catholic (Christian)	USA & Canada	Nuns extend local eco-action education to 50,000 student population around Great Lakes.	Benedictine Sisters from Pennsylvania take their Glinodo Earth Force Programme to New York State and Ontario, Canada. This has big impact on health of Lake Erie
11	United Methodists (Christian)	USA	Church commits \$40 billion to ethical investments	The United Methodist Pension Board spearheaded a drive to convert all UM funds into ethical investments, pioneering the International Interfaith Investment Group (3iG)
12	United Methodists (Christian)	USA	Church eliminates use of chlorine-treated paper	In order to tackle problem of toxic dioxins released in paper production (and incineration) the United Methodists stopped using chlorine-treated paper and persuaded national printing company to do the same.
13	Episcopal (Christian)	USA	Interfaith Power and Light Campaign	8,000 US Episcopalian churches assessed energy consumption and switched to more renewable forms. Extended through California Council of Churches (3,400 in that state alone)
14	Daoism	China	Alternatives to traditional medicine	Daoist researchers are identifying alternative sustainable ingredients to replace the use of endangered species in traditional Chinese medicine
15	Hinduism	Orissa, India	Restoring the sacred forests	Working with local government, Hindu groups replant and restore Orissa sacred forest and using sustainable wood for annual festival parade of chariots.

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16	Hinduism	Bagmati River Nepal	Restoring sacred river	A Hindu association has been formed to help restore the over-extracted and polluted sacred Bagmati River by education, direct action and influencing government agencies.
17	Islam	Cairo, Egypt	Municipal dump converted to public park	30 hectares of rubbish dump at al-Darassa, Cairo have been cleaned up to create a park with clean water reservoirs, orchards, landscaped gardens and plant nurseries
18	Islam	Saudi Arabia	Jabal Aja biosphere reserve established	Area of 2.200 km ² rich in rare and endangered species established as 'gene bank' for plant and animal species in line with Islamic principle of hima.
19	Islam	Tanzania	End to use of dynamite for fishing on coral reefs	Local sheiks used Islamic teachings to show that environmentally disastrous use of dynamite to kill fish was un-Islamic.
20	Islam	Lampeter, UK	Academic centre for study of Islam & Ecology established	University of Lampeter in Wales is working with ARC to establish a unique centre to further theological and practical work in Muslim communities.
21	Jainism	Ninama, India	Jain Ashram builds new village for earthquake victims	After their village was destroyed by earthquake in 2001, residents were given a new 335-house village, built for them by a nearby Jain community to embody principles of communal living and ecological wisdom.

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22	Judaism	UK	Environmental audit of synagogues	The Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues carried out a wide-ranging environmental audit focused on climate change and forestry. As well as educational programmes, the ULPS only uses approved sustainable wood products.
23	Judaism	UK	Environmental programme launched by major Jewish groups	A collaboration between the Board of Deputies and Jewish green organisation Noah has launched a programme integrating sustainable practice into all levels of Jewish life.
24	Shintoism	Japan	Shintos commit to sustainable forest management	The Association of Shinto shrines is using Religious Management Standards for their sacred forests, as well as only using sustainable timber for ceremonial rebuilding of their 80,000 shrines.
25	Sikhism	Delhi, India	Gurdwara project	Looking at the use of resources in Gurdwaras and moving to more solar power and fuel-efficiency especially in the langar kitchens that feed anyone who presents themselves. Set up EcoSikh, worldwide organisation about Sikhism and green issues.
26	Zoroastrianism	India	Recycling used flower offerings and collecting rainwater	Vast amounts of flower offerings left at Fire Temples during the holy period of Muktdad are used for vermicompost to feed Zoroastrian temple lands. Also revived the principle of catching rainwater and storing it in underground tanks.

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27	Zoroastrianism	India	Sacred Baval tree groves established	The rare baval tree exclusively provides wood for the sacred fires perpetually burning in Zoroastrian temples. Over 15 years they have replanted and reared trees in nurseries to become sustainably self-sufficient in the wood.
28	Indigenous religion	Huiricuta Mountain, Mexico	Sacred protected area increased by 50%	The sacred mountain is a natural temple and the site of an annual pilgrimage. It is also one of the most biodiverse places on Earth. The people are working with conservation groups and government to extend the protected area to 110,000 hectares.