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ARC – major project themes

While much of ARC's work has involved supporting faith groups in establishing plans and strategies (and, most important of all, the theological basis for them) the immediacy of the environmental crisis makes it crucial to support action now. These are some of the major areas of work that ARC has been involved in supporting.

Religious Forests

There is a long history of sustainable stewardship by religious groups in managing forests and groves considered sacred. ARC is working in partnership with the Oxford University Biodiversity Institute and the World Database on Sacred Sites to map the extent of sacred forests worldwide. Researchers estimate that about 15% of the world's dry surface is 'sacred land'. In tandem with this exercise ARC has been working since 2007 with Japanese Shintos, Swedish Lutherans and conservation organisations including WWF to establish international standards for religious-owned forests which, when applied, will mean millions of hectares of religious forestry being managed in an environmentally sustainable way.

<http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=265>

Faith in Food

Up to 30% of a person's carbon footprint comes from the food they eat, so encouraging religious believers to make 'planet friendly' food choices can lead to significant environmental gains. At the same time all faithful people should be concerned about the injustice of food distribution around the world. In addition, food has great symbolic spiritual significance in all major faiths and is used in ritual and worship.

The Faith In Food programme launched in 2010 to support faith communities in recognising that eating is a moral and spiritual act that affects all life on earth. The programme encourages them to work together to create a powerful global movement for a fairer, healthier and more sustainable food system. Actions include developing ethical food purchasing policies for religious buildings and institutions,

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supporting local food production and addressing food poverty both locally and worldwide.

<http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=520>

Green Pilgrimage

While it is impossible to measure exactly, ARC estimates that at least 150 million pilgrim journeys are made to sacred sites every year. Launched in 2011 at an international conference in Assisi, Italy, the Green Pilgrimage Network links 12 pilgrimage destinations where both spiritual and municipal authorities are pledged to reducing the environmental impact of this mass movement of people.

Strategies involving carbon-efficient transport, identifying sustainable food and power, avoidance of plastic food and drink containers (and clearing up of other rubbish) are being developed, as well as more positive initiatives such as tree planting and encouraging pilgrims to contribute to local environmental action programmes as part of their pilgrim experience.

<http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=534>

Faith Schools and Water

The availability of sufficient clean water is a major issue affecting the health and wellbeing of adults and children around the world. Two million people die from diarrhoea every year but UNESCO has estimated that nearly half of that number could be prevented by awareness of basic hygiene. Hundreds of thousands of the world's schools are run by faith organisations, making them able to reach millions of children with messages about sanitation and hygiene as well as teaching good practice in water conservation and usage.

The Faith Schools and Water programme is a partnership set up in 2009 between ARC, the Dutch Ecological Management Foundation and the International Water & Sanitation Centre. Programme activities include developing teaching resources for use within faith schools to encourage healthier practices and positive use of water resources.

<http://waterschools.org/>

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3iG – International Interfaith Investment Group

The combined investment holdings of the world's major religions represent an enormous potential for influence in the world: in 2000 the US United Methodist Pension Fund alone amounted to some US\$13 billion. The International Interfaith Investment Group project was convened by ARC in 2002 to encourage the socially responsible use of the religions' investments in a number of ways, including disinvesting in socially or environmentally harmful businesses, positively investing in socially or environmentally beneficial businesses and 'impact investing' to achieve direct social goals (e.g. microfinance schemes for community development, alternative/sustainable energy development). As well as directing the core funds of the religions themselves, 3iG hopes to generate 'cascade' investment whereby members of the faith are themselves encouraged to invest their own savings in socially responsible ways.

<http://www.3iGnet.org/>