

Newsletter No.9

March 2009

Dear All,

A very warm and sunny welcome on this lovely spring day. First, thank you for all your great feedback about the Catholic schools eco newsletters: it's really important to their continuation (which is not funded) and it makes us feel good too.

And thank you too for keeping us up to date with all your work: we have been constantly delighted and surprised by all the eco events and activities which are taking place at Catholic schools and colleges around the country. We hope you'll find the stories below thought provoking and offering inspiration to take action.

This edition looks at:

- 1. More than 250 schoolchildren turned out in Cardiff Bay to launch "a modern day ark". Find out how schools can link together to work on their own Ark Day.**
- 2. Would Christ have wept if he saw four dead ducks on an Arctic Island? People mostly say yes, Priests mostly say no. Read this article by ARC's Catholic Correspondent, which might be particularly interesting as a discussion lesson for older pupils.**
- 3. Ideas from the schools: Fairtrade award, St Valentine's roses, and a fairtrade fashion show.**

1. Origami Arks on a Cardiff Lightship: An Update on Operation Noah's campaign for schoolchildren

A report for the Catholic Eco-Schools newsletter by Catholic presenter and campaigner, Mark Dowd:

"More than 250 schoolchildren, their teachers, parents, churchgoers and environmentalists turned out in Cardiff Bay to launch Operation Noah's "ARK Campaign." On a gloriously sunny morning, children came dressed in animal masks and we even had a surprise figure: Noah himself in the shape of local headteacher from St Mary's Primary School in Canton, Roy Jeffries. All this to draw attention to the immense urgency of raising public awareness of what is at stake at this December's crunch climate summit in Copenhagen.

As members of the Risca Salvation Army Brass Band struck up the opening chords of "All Creatures of our God and King", the children processed solemnly on board in pairs onto a local lightship. There they joined all the adults on the top deck for a 45 minute service that was characterised by a spirit of joyfulness and reverence.

There was an amazing “hush” as local soprano Llio Evans sang a spine-chilling Welsh ballad, *Ar Lan y Mor* (“By the seaside”). The children performed *Pwy wnaeth y ser uwch ben?* (Who made the Flowers?) with appropriate hand actions, whilst the head and deputy head of Mount Stuart School recited a bi-lingual account of the magnificent Psalm 148: “Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths.”

Jeff Williams from Christian Aid then led a joint presentation on why climate change was a pressing priority for people of faith, whether adults or children:

“Look around you on this vessel and you are reminded of one important truth: this is not just about animals, it is about humans too. It is a question of justice and of survival for all God’s creatures.”

A special prize was awarded to the individual with the best mask or costume: which was won by a young pupil who came dressed in a white coat as a vet. And then, against the stopwatch, Jo Jamison from Operation Noah took just over a minute to show everyone how to make an origami Ark which can be signed and sent to Number Ten Downing Street. The aim is to petition Gordon Brown to broker a deal at December’s Copenhagen meeting of governments on Climate Change – and to ask him to support a move to make radical cuts in power emissions as the next step towards a zero carbon power sector.

“This was a hugely important start to the Ark Campaign,” said Mark Dowd who co-ordinated the event. “The symbol of the Ark was a focus, a magnet for believers and non-believers alike...More than that, it put our children first. As we saw the children processing and singing, I can’t have been the only one who was asking myself: “What kind of world will we be leaving for these young people in the decades ahead?”

Operation Noah was keen to report back to the Catholic Eco Schools newsletter, in the hope that similar “Ark mobilisations” can take place around the country and beyond. A special DVD of the event will be edited in the coming weeks and posted on Youtube and on the ON website.

We spoke with Mark Dowd about how schools can mobilise Operation Noah’s ARK Campaign in time for Copenhagen. He said there were 3 levels:

- (i) making origami arks (on FSC or recycled paper) to be signed and sent to the PM. Mark said he hoped that No.10 Downing Street would recycle the paper from any origami arks. (The instructions can be downloaded from ON’s website).
- (ii) creating a cardboard ark for your own school: the Operation Noah model is about 4’x2’ but it could be bigger. It is hoped schools will place their arks in their lobbies/reception areas, together with an explanation of what needs doing where members of the public, cleaners, parents will see them.

- (iii) Although the Operation Noah team is quite small, Mark said it would be fairly easy to galvanise 10 or so schools clustered in one region to hold another Ark Day like the one in Cardiff. At the moment they are considering holding similar events in Plymouth, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Doncaster. Bristol is not on the list right now – but if schools on this network got together and contacted Operation Noah, then this could happen: <http://www.operationnoah.org/home>

Mark added that the NGO representatives involved (CAFOD, Friends of the Earth, Christian Aid, Tearfund, WWF, the Evangelical Alliance, OXFAM and more) had not previously had contact with one another in Cardiff and the Ark event was a good opportunity for them to engage with one another. The event also fostered a community spirit with children, schools, churches and NGOs working together. For him, the two most positive outcomes were that the campaign focused on children (so many environmental projects do) and also that there was an upbeat feeling from the event. He said he hoped the project would be set alight.

2. Would Christ have wept if he saw four dead ducks on an Arctic Island? People mostly say yes, Priests mostly say no.

When leading lay activist, and ARC's Catholic consultant Mary Colwell was preparing for the World Social Forum in Brazil in January she wrote the following article about her concern for the Amazon, suggesting that the Catholic Church should be championing its protection. **Although intended for an adult readership there may well be issues which children and young adults may be interested in:**

"This Tuesday, January 27th 2009 the World Social Forum opens in Belem in Brazil. It promises to be a jamboree of events, talks, stalls, calls to action and heated discussion about the future of the Amazon basin by groups involved in social and environmental justice in this region; NGOs, pressure groups, charities, scientists, human rights activists and environmentalists will all be present.

Tomorrow, on January 24th, also in Belem, there is a meeting of Jesuits and associates to discuss their role in this vitally important part of the world. I will be attending both.

The Amazon basin is undoubtedly one of the most important eco-systems on earth. It regulates the atmosphere, absorbs carbon dioxide, provides one third of all the fresh water entering the oceans, and has by far the greatest biodiversity of any region on the planet. And, crucially, all of it sits cradled in the hands of Catholic countries.

The fact that the Amazon is a Catholic issue is largely missed on many people, including many in the Church, but Catholicism is embedded in the communities that live and govern there and therefore I believe this gives the Catholic Church a particular duty of care.

Of course there are many Catholics doing extraordinary work, particularly on the issue of land rights, community protection from logging and supporting those who seek to protect the rights of the indigenous peoples who populate many areas of the forest. Some have lost their lives doing it; Sister Dorothy Stang immediately comes to mind, and there are many others. Here I have no doubt the call of the gospel is being proclaimed. But I still have an uneasy feeling about the role of the Church in securing the protection of the rainforest - because there are still many questions that need to be addressed in order to promote action.

Protection of the rainforest from the destructive power of loggers, ranchers, mining companies and monoculture will require assertive action on behalf of areas where no people live, and vast areas of the Amazon are uninhabited (by people). And this is where the problem lies, because I believe the Catholic Church – Christianity – has no clear idea of our relationship to nature outside of its connection to people.

Of course, if people are living in an area, the Christian duty to fight for the rights of the poor and dispossessed are clear, and the forest is protected by default. But what about those areas devoid of people? What does Catholicism think about trees and animals when they are not contributing directly to human welfare?

If by cutting down a section of rainforest no one loses their home or is killed or made ill, does it matter? Particularly if cutting down the trees provides short-term employment. To put it baldly, does nature have a value in and of itself outside its contribution to human wellbeing?

To many people, when I have asked that question, the answer is a resounding yes, and it may seem strange that I have posed this question at all. But my experience of talking to all levels of the Catholic Church over the past four years has shown that the “yes” vote lies mainly in the lay community. In my experience the hierarchy of the Church is less likely to be convinced that the Church should act on behalf of that which is not human. And if the hierarchy won't act then I deeply fear not just for the future of the Amazon but for tundra, ice fields, grasslands, mountains and oceans as well.

The reason I have this impression about the Church is because over the past few years I have been asking a particular question based on a personal experience.

About 15 years ago I went to the high Arctic to film a rare species of duck called a Spectacled Eider. This rather bizarre bird lives out its whole life above the Arctic Circle and even over-winters sitting in the middle of the frozen Bering Sea. It is a quite extraordinary and awe-inspiring little bird.

I stayed on a remote island and filmed a female brood with her clutch of eggs and then the ducklings waddle off into the Arctic Ocean to begin

their mysterious lives out of the way of human influence. Very few people see Spectacled Eiders and so this was a great privilege.

A few years later I telephoned the man who owned the island to ask how the ducks were doing and his news was deeply shocking. The year after I left he went back again to check on the four females that regularly nest on his island. All four had been shot sitting on the nest. No one had taken the bodies for food, they hadn't used the feathers or the eggs; they had been shot simply for being ducks in America. I put the phone down and wept, not just for the wickedness of the people who had carried out this callous act of violence but for the senseless loss of magnificent creatures.

My question to lay Catholics, religious and the Church hierarchy alike is this:

If Christ had been walking over that island and found those dead ducks, would he have wept? Not just for the people who had killed animals, but for the loss of the ducks themselves?

Overwhelmingly the answer to that question from the lay community is "yes", but the hierarchy is split, with many saying "no – Christ wouldn't weep over that which is not human."

This story illustrates my point that there is confusion about our relationship to nature and therefore an unwillingness to put time and resources into the non-human world. It follows that it is unlikely that most of the Amazon Basin will really be the focus of concerted effort by the Church, because it will require it to take up the cause of nature itself. I sincerely hope I am wrong.

This is the year the Church has to act decisively. In November the Copenhagen COP will bring together 189 major governments to make the next set of decisions about climate change, which will include deals over deforestation and carbon trading.

Deforestation accounts for 20% of all greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere, more than all forms of transport combined. Simply by stopping cutting down the rainforest we will slash carbon emissions by a fifth. But other forces are at work. Huge industry needs the raw resources provided by rainforest areas - palm oil, beef, mining, ranching, soya and hardwood - and big money has a loud and powerful voice.

Will the Church be there at the table championing the environment or industry? Does it feel secure enough in its own theology of creation to make a case for rainforest protection? The Amazon needs the Catholic Church, but will it be there and respond to the cry for help?

In this year leading up to Copenhagen we don't need more words, what we need is action. If the Pope would say Mass in the middle of the smoking ruins

of a cleared area of forest, then he would focus the attention of the world onto that area in an entirely new way. The power of the symbolic gesture that inspires hearts and minds will do more to protect the rainforest than any number of words. This is the year to fire imagination and propel the world into a new era of environmental concern, and the Pope has the power to help that become a reality."

To read ARC's newstory about Mary's report, please link here:

<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=289>

Mary Colwell is Catholic consultant to the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) and UNDP. She is also a film-maker with more than 20 years experience working at the Natural History Unit of the BBC. A version of this article was printed by the leading Catholic weekly [The Tablet](http://www.thetablet.co.uk/) (http://www.thetablet.co.uk/) in March 2009.

3. Green ideas from Catholic Schools:

1. Has your school got Fairtrade Status?

<http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/schools/default.aspx>

The Fairtrade Foundation is working hard with schools to get Fairtrade status: the website details are above, but in brief, it involves the following key stages:

1. Getting a steering group together of teachers, pupils from different years, the School Council and catering staff. This helps pupils learn how to give presentations to get people interested in issues.
2. Filling out an audit and questionnaire
3. Read the five goals of fair trade, and start working towards them
4. Hold a celebration, and tell everybody about it

St Brendan's Sixth Form College in Bristol was awarded Fair Trade status last year: and as you'll see from the following examples, their 'People & Planet' group is full of creative ideas – for fair-trade fortnight and other times too.

- St Valentine's Roses: Students and staff had a full celebration of St Valentine's Day this year – including ethically grown roses sold for an ethical cause. Everyone was encouraged to wear red into college that day and as a special treat, the radio flex shows throughout the day were all valentines themed. Sappy love ballads were in abundance and special dedications were shouted out. Members from the 'People & Planet' group also set up a stall during the day where they sold Fairtrade roses some of which were donated by the Co-op. They made over £100 for the Fairtrade

Foundation.

- A Fairtrade fashion show and Banana competition:

Encouraged by the Valentine's success, St Brendan's celebrated Fairtrade fortnight with an ethical fashion show at the end of February. 'People & Planet' group linked to Marks and Spencers in Bath to organise an ethical fashion show which served to highlight a wide range of Fairtrade products. Three College bands performed during the show. Students then took to the catwalk to model Fairtrade clothes, donated by Marks and Spencer and highlight the use of Fairtrade cotton and recycled goods. "It is a good opportunity to gain information about what is happening in the developing world, and how supporting Fairtrade goods can help," said People & Planet member Daniel Shearing. Fairtrade fortnight was rounded up by participating in the "Go Bananas" record attempt. See <http://www.stbrn.ac.uk/>

For more about the Fairtrade Foundation, please go to <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/>

As always, if you would like to contribute stories about the work your schools and colleges are doing we would be delighted to share them in our newsletters, or indeed if you have any comments on the value of the newsletters, please contact us at: info@arcworld.org

With very best wishes,

The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC)
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