

Greetings from ARC!

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1. O Magazine features ARC

They say it is impossible to buy a copy of *O Magazine* in Baltimore this month because so many of the 7,000 or more members of the New Psalmist Baptist congregation have gone out to buy up all the stocks in the city. The New Psalmists are featured on page 134 of the July edition of Oprah Winfrey's popular magazine, in an article about ARC's work with the faiths – and the faiths' work with the environment

Many of *O Magazine's* 2.6 million readers are women, many belong to a faith, and many are decision-makers in their families and communities throughout the United States. More details at <http://tinyurl.com/2weuam>

The story, titled "A Greener Calling" leads on how, "in an unprecedented show of unity, a global contingent of faith leaders are joining forces to preach the gospel of green".

"WINDSOR CASTLE, the bucolic weekend retreat of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and her pack of corgis, has witnessed the plague, beheadings, and centuries of state dinners, but it's surely never seen this: a procession of bearded Sikhs in orange turbans, bald Buddhist monks in habits, Jews in top hats and prayer shawls, Japanese Shintos in white jōes – even a Greek Orthodox archbishop in a black kamilafki hat and floor-length cassock," writes staff-writer Melanie Bryant.

"On an unseasonably warm day last November, a group of British schoolchildren led this diverse troop from the small town of Windsor through the castle's Hogwarts-worthy gate for a vegan feast of stuffed mushrooms and parsnips. It was all part of "Many Heavens, One Earth", an event organized by the United Nations and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), designed to promote environmental evangelism among people of faith – the largest international gathering of its kind."

The article goes on to give examples of many of the wonderful faith eco-initiatives launched at Windsor, plus interviews with some of the US-based. It quotes UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stating that faith leaders have the ear – and hearts – of 85 percent of the world's population. "You can, and do, inspire people to change," he said.

Already the article is leading to new initiatives. Yesterday I got an email from the New Psalmists' Rev Al Bailey saying they'd been contacted by a New York church (which had already created a medical centre and school in South Africa), wanting to know more about initiatives to help people living in areas without sanitation.

For those of you who would like to read more about Windsor and see some of the hundreds of photographs, we've kept our event website open at www.windsor2009.org and you can listen to the audio of the whole musical and dramatic celebration by going to the jukebox function on the home page.

2. Long Term Plans and preview of next newsletter

We are getting lots of news, week by week, from the different programmes launched at and after Windsor – EcoSikh is getting ready to launch and is just appointing its first staff; a Green Pilgrim Cities initiative has already had several constructive meetings; a Faith Schools and Water programme has had a soft launch (<http://waterschools.wordpress.com/>); the Hindu Bhumi programme is so big in the UK that they have decided to wait to do their community launch until summer 2011 because

so many thousands of people have expressed interest; the Evangelical Church of Tanzania has so many requests by parishes for seedlings to fulfil their pledge of 8.5 million trees that the nurseries are having to expand quickly; “My problem just now is to provide enough seedlings,” writes Bishop Fredrick Shoo. <http://tinyurl.com/36mqcv8>.

And in Mongolia the monks spent two days in May debating their Eight-Year Eco-action Plan, which they are creating over the summer in consultation with monasteries from all of the 21 aimags – or districts – in the country. <http://tinyurl.com/36g2r2k> (Ideas included: promoting traditional construction practices – Mongolian temperatures range from -40 to +40 degrees, and Soviet concrete struggles to cope; getting solar energy into monastic and village communities; raising public awareness on forest fires; educating young monks and the lay community on environmental practices; reducing waste; seeking out the ancient ecological teachings that can be found in ancient texts, or sutras, which were hidden during the 60 years of communist rule last century).

Much of this has been made possible by the generosity of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Section of the Environment and Sustainable Development) which, following the Windsor Celebration, invited Olav Kjørven and Martin Palmer (the co-chairs of the UNDP/ARC partnership) to discuss how Norway could support Stage II of the programme. We are delighted to say that the Norwegian Government awarded a grant in late April which enables ARC not only to assist the development of the existing plans but to work with the new plans that are emerging. We’d like to express our huge gratitude.

Given the extraordinary amount of things happening we have decided to dedicate the next newsletter to the progress in the Plans around the world – which we will send out in July.

3. Food news from the faiths this summer

“When one’s food is pure, one’s being becomes pure.” So says the Chandogya Upanishad, one of the most ancient Hindu scriptures dating to the Vedic Brahmana period around 3000 years ago. Food is vital for physical survival but it also has great spiritual significance. Yet how many of us really think about what we eat and whether it represents the values we profess? Values such as care for the earth, compassion towards animals, global justice, food for all, climate change and sustainability? The choices we make of what, when and how we eat have an enormous impact upon the Earth, our fellow human beings and other living creatures. These are issues increasingly being considered by the faiths, which is why ARC is launching a new Faith in Food programme, in partnership with the UK’s leading organic charity, the Soil Association, to help us all focus more on what we need to do in order to ‘eat rightly’.

More on Faith in Food later. But meanwhile, we have some great news about thoughtful food-sourcing from the faiths this summer.

* First, an email from the Churches Media conference in the UK. Last year when I attended (it’s a brilliant conference for anyone in media) I was disappointed that the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, Derbyshire – a huge place which holds many Christian and other faith conferences – had such a “faith-inconsistent” food sourcing. Lots of battery eggs and battery chicken-breasts. But the Conference organisers wrote to say that after ARC’s enquiry they had been in touch with Swanwick. This year, not only were the eggs and poultry free-range, but they came from a local farm where the ethical egg business was set up to give homeless children in South Derbyshire something interesting to do, and something to care for. <http://tinyurl.com/2efg5cc> For the happy eggs and hens, and for other food sourcing that was much more local and organic, it cost about £5 extra a head for three days, though the Catholic Peace and Justice conference next month has negotiated a largely vegetarian free range, mostly organic and local menu for a smaller sum. For those newsletter readers who attend conferences through their faith, have you checked that the food is as free-range, local, and pesticide-free as possible? This is the second time that I’ve done that – the first was with the Methodists’ International Centre and hotel in London, which once thought it couldn’t afford ethical eggs, but after looking at

the real answer to that simple question now has one of the most ethical hotel restaurants in the city.

* A month ago I was in Millie's café in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia with two members of the team brought together by the 24-year old spiritual leader, the Karmapa, in India to get the environmental message out to his million or so Buddhist followers in Tibet, India, Sikkim, China and elsewhere. They both come from Tibetan families, so I was expecting them to tuck into the burgers. But no, they both said with a smile, they have given up meat. The Karmapa, I learned, has turned vegetarian. And so have all his hundreds of monasteries in India and the Himalayas and many of his followers. Tibetans are traditionally huge meat eaters: at those altitudes it has always seemed the most obviously available food. "At first when His Holiness said 'Don't eat meat', the monks thought 'what do you mean?'," said Gyaltzen, a 33-year-old monk from Rumtek monastery, as he wolfed down a cheese pizza. "But at [our annual festival] he asked a thousand monks how many of them wanted to take the vow, and they all said 'yes!' It's been three years now." Read the story at <http://tinyurl.com/2vtqhpa> or check out <http://www.khoryug.com/>

* Another group that went vegetarian for a moment this month was London Zoo. With ARC's advice and support the Zoological Society of London organised a ground-breaking talk about how conservationists can work with faiths to protect nature. And for the first time, on ARC's request, they provided a fully vegetarian meal afterwards. There were a few doubters beforehand, but the Indian meal was so delicious that on the night there were no dissenters. The tri-colour rice caused a few surprises. It was supposed to be a natural mix of wild, red and brown rice, but the caterers interpreted it as regular ordinary white rice, with some lurid food colouring... including blue! We understand that the talks – given by ARC's Martin Palmer, the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences Fazlun Khalid, IUCN's Simon Stuart and the Durrell Institute's Susannah Paisley and Stuart Harrop – were so well-received that the zoo is considering organising a follow-up next year. Although perhaps not with the blue rice.

4. And finally, an ecological fable from Daoism about the usefulness, sometimes, of uselessness

*One day a sage, wandering amongst the mountains of Shang, came upon a great and unusual tree. A thousand chariots could shelter under and they would all be covered. "What kind of tree is this?" he asked. "It is surely a most wondrous piece of timber!" But when he looked up, he could see the smaller branches were so twisted and gnarled that they could not be made into rafters and beams. And looking down at the trunk he saw it was warped and distorted too, and would not make good coffins. He licked one of its leaves and his mouth felt scraped and sore. "This tree is certainly good for nothing," said the wise man. "This is why it has grown so large."... "Ah ha!" he realized. "This is the sort of uselessness that sages live by." Adapted from *The Book of Chuang Tsu* Penguin Classics trans. Martin Palmer. p34.*

Best wishes!