

Catholic Schools Eco-Newsletter No. 17

October 2010

Hello! As we all enjoy the jewel-like colours of autumn, we welcome you to our latest newsletter. So far this term the communications team has been busy creating an education pack with a free DVD, the water schools team has been visiting the Philippines to talk about some of the issues, and a new food team has been signing up to revolutionise school meals.

In this edition:

- A. Hearing the Voices of Creation: free RE Teachers Pack for Keystage 3
- B. The Water Schools programme reaches the Philippines
- C. Faith in Food – faith schools revolutionising school meals

A. Hearing the Voices of Creation: a free RE Teachers Pack

What do the major religions teach us about the environment? What is their view of how humans fit into the rest of nature and what do they say about the nature of our relationship with the divine?

A DVD exploring these questions from the perspective of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism is being sent out free this month to nearly 1,000 schools around the UK, sponsored by the Ashden Trust and using footage from ARC's fantastic *Hearing the Voices of Creation* celebration at Windsor Castle last November, in the presence of HRH The Prince Philip and the Secretary of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon. With full gospel choir, Indian classical dancers, Sikh musicians, a Tibetan throat singer, and an important message.

The DVD Teachers Pack is aimed at helping RE teachers at key stage 3 to stimulate pupils' imaginative and artistic engagement with faiths and the environment through narrative, drama and music. It celebrates the times and ways in which we have allowed other parts of nature to speak for themselves. It includes four lessons based around Creation, Crisis, Restoring the Balance and Images of the Future.

The pack was launched last month at 'A Garden Party to Make a Difference', <http://www.startgardenparty.co.uk/> the festival of sustainability at Clarence House, the London residence of The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall.

Among the poems and stories included are *The Story of the Monkey King* (Buddhism) and *The Story of the Tree* (Christianity). Lesson 4 is based around St Francis' Canticle of the Creatures – it appears on the DVD as another gospel number, and when it was performed at Windsor – as the climax of the event –

even the soldiers, in their full bright uniform could be seen tapping their feet.

ARC director Martin Palmer explains: "We are hearing all the time about the planet from our perspective – will there be enough food for our grandchildren, enough water, enough land? But why don't we hear about it from the perspective of the thousands, the millions of other species?"

There has been really positive response so far from various RE groups from across the country. If you would like a copy please email us at arcworld@arcworld.org. You can download the Teacher's Pack directly from [http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Catholic Schools Eco 10-10.pdf](http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Catholic_Schools_Eco_10-10.pdf). Please send us feedback.

B. The Water Schools Programme Reaches the Philippines

In our schools here in the UK, clean water, good toilet and hygiene practices are pretty much taken for granted. But in many southern countries, dirty water, inadequate toilets and a lack of hand soap can all contribute to children becoming sick and missing school.

Other hygiene-related barriers preventing children from attending school in other parts of the world include the lack of facilities for menstruating girls (including in some cases no toilets at the schools at all) and the need for many children to walk several kilometers to fetch water for their families meaning there is no time to sit in a classroom. To help address these issues with the faiths and with secular water experts, ARC and its partner, Ecological Management Foundation (EMF), has launched a new programme: Water Schools.

In September the Water Schools team participated in the national convention of the Catholic Education Association in the Philippines (CEAP). The theme was: "A Heart for Eden, A Hand at Ecology", encouraging schools to share and develop sustainable best practices, and the linkage between faith and ecology. ARC's Nicki McHugh, Sister Mary Bellekom and Lia Otterspeer, EMF, travelled to the island of Cebu, which has the second biggest city in the Philippines to tell the 2,000-plus delegates about our work – and inviting them to become involved.

We also had the opportunity to visit a Catholic school with over 3,000 children. The children spend about 6 hours at school a day, with the school day broken into shifts to accommodate all of them. Although night schools in the UK are geared towards adults, the Philippines run night schools for children. Put simply, the reality faced by many families is that their children have to help support them financially. And so by offering schools in the evening, some of the poorer children can also receive an education.

Like all cities Cebu is one of contrasts. We saw luxurious buildings on one side of the street and on the other houses made with corrugated iron for roof tops and woven bamboo for walls. Sanitation is a major problem and septic tanks frequently overspill onto the street, eventually flowing back into the riverbeds.

The rivers, incidentally, are becoming dried out due to communities expanding in the north of the island. Rubbish was dumped in fields at the river's edge and a little further downstream we saw stilt houses which would be coming into contact with the debris.

We used our visit as a fact-finding mission and we are busy sifting through completed questionnaires. Of those replies so far, we have learnt that:

- most schools have experienced a water shortage in the last year;
- most have filtered water, but some do have to boil it before use;
- water conservation was not a specific topic within the curriculum;
- essentially all were interested in receiving resources to aid water-learning and education, for all ages (ages 3-adult);
- UN World Water Day is not currently celebrated, but most stated that they would from now on. Some schools use the sanctity of water in some baptismal ceremonies and events, where they praise having clean water and the facilities required;
- most have conservation and environmental clubs and groups, such as Clean-Up days, tree planting, recycling, eco-clubs, seashore cleaning and community action groups;
- the main climate issues that all regions in the Philippines face are flooding, drought, pollution, rubbish disposal and sewage facilities. The majority of schools stated that these issues are a problem to their environment.

There were no requests or pleas for funding, but instead overwhelmingly positive reactions to finding out more about the Water Schools programme, learning how the sisters and teachers could engage further, knowing which resources and materials they could easily access to help them with their teaching.

We have returned to the UK with many contacts of Catholic schools in the Philippines. We have much more work to do before we begin implementing programmes with the faiths next autumn, but we wanted to leave you with the following thoughts.

- Would your school be interested in opening up a dialogue with the schools to share knowledge and information on education and water and ecology?
- What resources and materials are you aware of which they might benefit from – which can be easily downloaded from a website?
- Might you like to run a class on the water difficulties faced in a school in

South-East Asia?

- How do you celebrate water and your faith in your curriculum? We learnt about the celebrated El Santo Nino de Cebu – and how the Spanish brought Christianity to the island of Cebu in the 16th century. El Santo Nino de Cebu is depicted as Jesus as a child holding the world in his hands - and we were told how the fishermen had found the statue in the island's waters. It struck us that the sisters and teachers could use this image to link their faith and ecology.

Your help would be appreciated by so many.

C. Revolutionising school meals: Faith in Food

Many schools are holding Harvest Festivals this term as a way of giving thanks for the fruits of the earth. They are also a recognition that, as well as being vital for survival, food is one of life's most positive and enjoyable experiences. Food also goes to the heart of our relationship with the rest of Creation.

If we believe – as so many faiths do believe – that we have a responsibility to care for the Earth, then we should try to ensure the food we eat has not been produced in a way that harms the environment or farm workers, or causes suffering to livestock, or results in a situation where some people have too much to eat while a billion people worldwide go to bed hungry each night.

That's why ARC is launching a new Initiative – Faith in Food – which aims to restore 'a right relationship' with food and the land it comes from.

One of our partners is the Soil Association, the UK's leading sustainable agriculture organisation, and one of the best ways in which schools can reconnect children with where their food comes from is to sign up to its "Food for Life" Partnership. This is a network of schools and communities working together to revolutionise school meals.

Interestingly, of the 1,994 active schools in the partnership, 402, or 20 percent are faith schools. Of these nearly 300 are Church of England and the majority of the rest are Roman Catholic. Methodist, Jewish and Greek Orthodox schools have also signed up but only one or two of each so far.

If your school has not yet signed up to Food for Life, we urge you to do so. To find out more, visit <http://www.foodforlife.org.uk/>. And keep an eye on the ARC website for more details on Faith in Food which we will be launching in a month's time. Let us know if you do, and we'll let others know!

We'll be back before Christmas.