

Hello

As the Copenhagen meeting on Climate Change reaches its third day, we've been enjoying the daily broadcasts by Odyssey <http://www.odysseynetworks.org/> fronted by UK Catholic broadcaster and environmental activist Mark Dowd.

Today it was "thirty seconds of wisdom" from the faiths about Climate Change. Yesterday the video showed us the Norwegian ferry as a temporary hotel for the 1000 delegates from the Lutheran church (including ALL the Bishops) who came by sea. The broadcast is a good resource, and might be a source of inspiration for RE (or any other eco-inspired classes) this term.

In terms of other useful resources you might also be interested in reading a sermon by Prince Philip <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=360> about the relevance of advent to Nature conservation (he wrote it two decades ago, and it's more relevant today than ever before... one Christian news agency thought it so good that they took it as their story of the week), and also a link <http://www.windsor2009.org/page15.htm> to a True Tube video for young people about our ARC Windsor event last month, launching some 30 faith action plans (including several Catholic ones) on the environment.

AND NOW FOR A SHORT HISTORY

A few people have asked me recently about the origins of this eco newsletter. And as we go towards a new decade, and start thinking about this initiative's future, I thought I'd share a little about its past.

As we enter the second week of Advent, I have an image of these newsletters being like an advent calendar – you pass us insights into some of the treasure houses of ideas and materials that are being created by the schools, and we provide a little window through which other schools can open them up.

It began in 2006, with the launch of *Sound of Many Waters* <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=350>, an initiative run from the Clifton Diocese to spend a year meditating on, thinking about, praying about and acting on, the protection of the natural environment. It was supported by my organization, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) and was the inspiration and idea of lay Catholic Mary Colwell, a senior producer for BBC Nature programmes, who believed fervently that care of nature is and should be a Catholic issue.

Part of that year involved talking to local Catholic schools – finding out what they're doing already on the environment, and just as importantly, asking what they needed to help them continue and expand that work. And the overwhelming response was that many Catholic schools are having really interesting ideas, but that what they wanted most of all was some kind of way to find out what other people are doing.

"I know what we should be doing for the environment because we're a school: what I want is to know what we should be doing because we're a Catholic school" was the heartfelt statement by a teacher which was our core motivation. So from 2007 we started sending out newsletters, telling schools what other schools are up to.

Some of our highlights of the past two years have included passing on:

- The idea that when a Catholic school undergoes a building project not only should it make that building project as environmentally gentle as possible, but that it should twin with a Catholic school in a poorer part of the world, and help them with their own building project, so it is about generosity and shared learning.
- The idea of, sometimes, having a "timetable crash" – say for Earth Day in spring, or the feast day of St Francis in October, where the whole timetable is dedicated to the environment. Cleaning streams (and learning about streamlife), building dens (eco-friendly ones, of course), using natural materials to dye cloth (and make prayer flags

- for the environment), doing eco-maths, writing stories about the natural world, and creating art out of local or recycled materials
- The related idea of holding an Ecoweek – although one school managed to choose the coldest week of the year to do this, it still managed to cut its energy bill, and to think of more than 20 useful and fun activities for the whole school to promote the ideas behind it, and establish better stewardship of its whole school site for the future.
 - Ideas about renting bikes to students, to encourage them to take the slower, healthier and more carbon-friendly way to class.
 - The information, from a WWF survey, that faith schools are likely to be much more sustainable and sustainable-minded than non-faith schools

Last month, in advance of the Copenhagen Climate Change summit this week, we held a big event at Windsor, where we launched 31 detailed action plans by as many faith traditions and organizations, at an event hosted by HRH The Prince Philip and with His Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon as a special guest. It was an extraordinary three days – you can read more about it on our event website www.windsor2009.org. And one of the key areas of action by each of the traditions was, of course, education. Half the schools in the world have a connection to a faith: and many of them are beginning to be leaders in environmental thinking.

Since 2007 we've had requests from several non-Catholic schools to listen in on our conversation by email, as well as several schools from overseas linking up to find out what British schools are doing. So you're beginning to be part of a wider network. Please take advantage of this – pass us on to colleagues at your school and other schools, and most importantly please let us know your eco-ideas, -prayers, -curricula, -activities, and anything else you think other people might be interested in. If we hear from you, then we can continue.

With best wishes,

Alliance of Religions and Conservation
www.arcworld.org
www.windsor2009.org and read our new blog on
<http://religionsandconservation.wordpress.com/>