GPN Newsletter May 2014

These past few weeks we’ve been celebrating Earth Day (April 22). Apparently (and this seems like a huge number, but it’s the official one) it prompted a billion people in 190 countries to take environmental action. It’s a particularly relevant celebration for us as the focus this year is Green Cities. According to the UN, by 2050 some 6.3 billion people will be living in urban areas. Check out Earth Day’s [Green Cities Campaign](#) pages for resources on greening buildings, energy and transport. I particularly liked some of the success stories: parking-protected bike lanes in New York, solar power for refugees in Burma, underwater turbine technology in Seattle...

Whether as part of Earth Day or not, many of our green pilgrimage places have been working hard this quarter. I’ve been in Bethlehem and Vadstena in Sweden and colleagues have been busy in Malaysia, China and India.

We’re always keen to hear news of what you have been doing to spread green pilgrimage. Please share it with us!

Best wishes, Alison

1. New website

As promised we’ve created a GPN website [www.greenpilgrimage.net](http://www.greenpilgrimage.net). It’s still on beta, so please take a look at it and tell us what you think.

2. European Chapter and Pearls of Life

The steering group for a European Chapter of the Green Pilgrimage Network held a meeting in Vadstena in Sweden at the end of February. Vadstena is the pilgrim city of Sweden’s St Bridget. She founded the first monastery of her Bridgettine Order here in 1350 and the city has been an important pilgrimage site since. Some 300,000 people visit the Pilgrim Centre and the Abbey Church every year. The Diocese of Linkoping, the city of Vadstena and its Pilgrim Centre have now all joined the GPN and are working on their joint action plan.

The Linkoping Diocese has chosen eco-theology as its theme this year and as part of their action they have adapted the “pearls of life bracelet” devised in 1995 by Swedish Bishop, Martin Lønnebo when he was stuck on a Greek island because of a storm. He had the idea of a bracelet as a contemporary aid to prayer. Each of the colored beads, or “pearls” is a prompt for reflection. Up until now there have been 18 beads starting with a gold one for God. Then (with the wooden beads
prompting a moment of silence) going counter clockwise, I (or Self), Baptism, Desert, Serenity, Carefree, Love (two red beads), Mystery (three white beads), Night, Silence and Resurrection. But now, a green pearl has been added.

Ewa Lundh, manager of the Pilgrim Centre, explains: “Pilgrims are asked to add a green pearl and remember that what they do to care for the environment and for each other all reflects on the wonder of creation.” The bracelets are for sale in the Church and in the Pilgrim Centre. You can read about its story, the meaning of the pearls and how to use them in a new book, *Pearls of Life*, published by Iona Books. It set us thinking about how members might use a version. Could pilgrims collect a green bead at each Green Pilgrim site? Do please let me know what ideas you have.

### 3. Bethlehem: “Come smell and taste our green pilgrimage”

Wearing our pearl bracelets, some of us went straight from the meeting in Vadstena to a workshop in Bethlehem in early March. Bethlehem joined the GPN last year, twinning with Trondheim, Norway. The Peace Centre is in Manger Square, overlooking the Church of the Nativity (the site of the birth of Christ and one of the most important Christian pilgrimage sites.) The workshop was hosted by the Mayor of Bethlehem, Vera Baboun. She told delegates that this was “an initiative Bethlehem wants and needs.”

It was backed by other religious leaders in Bethlehem. Abed Al Majid Al Amarnah, Mufti of the Bethlehem Governate reminded us that “people who do not keep the environment clean are not obeying God's orders. Keeping the environment clean is an important pillar in Islam.” Bishop Munib Younan, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land also supported the initiative. “Green pilgrimage can have a positive effect on Bethlehem and the region,” he said, warning that “green pilgrimage must include authentic engagement with the 'living stones' of the Holy Land, otherwise tourists are coming to museums.”

He invited members of the Network to “smell the green pilgrimage: eat our olive oil, eat our apricots and taste our cucumbers…. Green Pilgrimage is not only the sustainability of the environment but ensuring the sustainability of those living around the holy places.”

*A GPN development plan for Bethlehem will now be drawn up. It will include conserving and restoring cultural heritage, promoting local foods and handicrafts along with urban planning and community-based eco tourism. There will be new walking routes as well as greener hotels and greener waste and plans to encourage children to care for the environment.*

### 4. What’s the “number one walking trail in the world?”
Some of the partners at the Bethlehem workshop are involved in the Abraham’s Path Initiative. The long distance walking trail across the Middle East using local guides, local signage and local accommodation has just been rated as the National Geographic number one walking trail in the world. Congratulations! You can download a guidebook to the Abraham Path here.

5. A Green hospitality code at Nabi Musa Mosque

I also visited the Nabi Musa Mosque where the Prophet Moses is said to have been buried just outside Jerusalem in the Judean desert. Ihab Balha, Sufi and teach of Islam, talked about his work to develop the Mosque as a centre for desert hospitality, recreating a Muslim code of green hospitality for visitors and attracting tourists and pilgrims to a desert area as a place of peace. It’s hoped to establish a framework for a hospitality code between travellers and pilgrims together with the Bedouin, the residents of the desert around Nabi Musa, and explore how a code of hospitality could help sustain the local economy.

6. Hindu Environment Week

In February the Bhumi Project organised the first ever Hindu Environment Week with the theme ‘Green Pilgrimage’. Over 5,000 people took part in 25 different events in more than 12 locations across India and internationally. It included:

- A water blessing ceremony at the Parmarth Niketan ashram in Rishikesh (under the guidance of Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati) to raise awareness about the sanctity of water and issues facing the river Ganges. Later students from the ashram's school installed a bio-sand water purification system in a village school.
- In Chennai, the CP Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation launched an exhibition on Green Pilgrimage. It cleverly showed traditional approaches to pilgrimage in India, compared to modern practices, and the devastating impact that can have. The Foundation aims to create a mobile version of the exhibition and take it across India.
Hindus in Puri and Varanasi organized a full seven days of events including cleaning temple grounds, tree plantations, and a bicycle expedition. In Varanasi this was organised by a dedicated group of students from Banaras Hindu University. In Puri, the Jagannath temple took the lead and brought together over 30 different NGOs, along with police officers, life guards, government officials and business leaders.

Students from the Food For Life Vrindavan school participated in mock classroom debates on the importance of caring for the environment and spent a day cleaning streets of the ancient temple town.

In Mount Abu, headquarters for the Brahma Kumaris, a conference was held to discuss the importance of the environment, attended by Dadi Janaki, administrative head of the organisation.

In Mumbai, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness held events at Bhaktivedanata Hospital, at their temple in Chowpatty, and in their rural development project north of the city. Almost 3,000 people took part.

The Saibaba Mandir in Shirdi, Maharashtra took part in a consultation on a Green Temples Guide being developed by ARC and Bhumi.

Hindu students at Oxford University in England and Princeton University in America held events to discuss the importance of caring for the environment as young Hindus.

Special statements on the environment and the importance of green pilgrimage were issued by Sri Rameshbhai Oza in Porbandar and the office of the Shankaracharya of Dwarka. Eco events were also held in both places.

Bhumi’s Gopal Patel, who coordinated the week, writes, “For me, the highlight was in Puri at the Jagannath Temple. At 7am we went to clean the temple grounds and so many volunteers showed up that we ran out of equipment and gloves, so people had to be turned away. It was then I realised the power of the GPN message and how our work in India is just starting.”

Next year’s Hindu Environment Week, will take place from February 15th - 21st.

8. Green Guide for Hajj in Malaysia

The first international conference on Greening the Hajj took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 20-21 February. Supported by ARC, it was organized by ARC’s Islamic Programmes advisor, Dr Husna Ahmad, author of “The Green Guide for Hajj” and the Islamic Education Foundation in Malaysia. They’ve already made impressive steps, reducing the number of days people stay in the desert, cutting pilgrim numbers, recommending a new Muslim tradition of going on Hajj ONLY ONCE in your life to show how devout you are...Read more about it here.
9. Ise meeting in May

At our last meeting of the GPN in July 2013 in Trondheim, Jinja Honcho (the Association of Shinto Shrines in Japan) invited us to hold our next meeting in Ise, Japan to mark the rebuilding of the Grand Shrine of Ise. This will now be a consultative meeting in May/June to plan the future of the Green Pilgrimage Network as well as an opportunity to contribute to a working group on Values as part of the post 2015 process of the UN Millennium Goals. We look forward to sharing news of that meeting with you in the next newsletter.

10. Funding opportunities: Rockefeller grant

Does your city qualify for this Rockefeller grant? Rome, Bristol and Mexico were amongst those selected for 2014.

Next edition

Next time news from China as three Daoist cities join the Green Pilgrimage Network.

Best wishes, Alison

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