

July 2010

Hello!

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- * Sarum College celebrates 150 years

Hayes Christian Conference Centre creates an ethical food policy

Recently I received an exciting email from the Churches Media conference in the UK.

It's a brilliant conference for anyone involved in media, whatever your religious affiliation, but when I attended in 2009 I was disappointed that the food in what is the largest Christian conference centre in the country (the Hayes Centre in Swanwick, Derbyshire) had such a "faith-inconsistent" way of sourcing its food. The eggs were battery offerings, and the chickens whose breasts (one per person on the feed-up-the-young-clergymen 1950s model of Christian catering) lay in pale rows for our evening meal had never been near a woodland or piece of grass. I wrote to the conference organizers and to Hayes, but their answers suggested it was difficult, and not cost-effective to make changes.

But this year it's different. After my enquiry the Churches Media Conference had been in touch with the Hayes management, and had started negotiating. And it turned out that Hayes had believed that nobody would pay more for kinder food, and were glad to be proved wrong. 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> The other food sourcing too was much more local, kind and organic. "When people come to us in future wanting organic food we now know where to source it," said Peter Anderson of Hayes. Congratulations to the teams both at Hayes and the CMC.

If you are curious, the cost implication was £5 extra per person for three days (and I hear that by going more vegetarian, the Catholic Peace and Justice Conference has negotiated a mostly organic and local menu for a smaller sum per meal.

This is the second time I've helped that kind of change happen. The first was with the Methodists' International Centre and Hotel in London, which once thought it couldn't afford free-range eggs, but after looking at the real answer to that simple question now has one of the most ethical hotel restaurants in the city. I'd love to hear about anybody in this list who has also managed to help people bring about changes in food sourcing.

Hilfield Friary, Dorset

Brother Samuel of Hilfield Friary tells us that they have launched a new website www.hilfieldfriary.org.uk communicating some of the developments which have taken place here over the past year, in particular the widening of their Franciscan community and their commitment to work for a more sustainable pattern of life.

"The Friary lies in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and part of our 19 acres of land has been designated as a site of Special Nature Conservation Interest. A Countryside Ranger has described our grassland as 'one of the finest wild-flower meadows in Dorset'. Our aim is to - manage our land so as to enable the greatest possible diversity of plant life and animal habitat. Being followers of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, we want to encourage others

to share in this with us, both through working on the land and by reflecting on issues around our relationship with the wider environment.

We are working towards living sustainably, growing an increasing amount of our own food and following the LOAF principles for purchasing (local, organic, animal friendly and fair trade), sharing cars, cycling or walking when possible, and looking for ways in which we can heat and power our buildings with lower use of fossil fuels.”

Meanwhile I created a short video for Hilfield, based on a visit last year. You can link to it here on Youtube: <http://tinyurl.com/245u66d> It's taken with a simple £100 camera, and edited on iMovie, which comes free on Apple computers - and it might be an interesting model for any retreat centres wanting to create low-cost videos to show their care for the environment. Do let me know if you have done videos, or would like to know more.

Emmaus House, Bristol

A lovely thing that has emerged from our occasional newsletters is that ARC has a new staff member, Sister Mary Bellekom, who is living at Emmaus House in Bristol, and was recommended to contact us by Emmaus' Sister Ann, who knew us from the newsletter. From La Retraite Order, Mary has been a teacher for many years in Chile and Cameroon. She joined us as a volunteer, and has now been appointed our Finance Officer.

Mary is working with Emmaus on a programme for primary school children to experience retreat days. Among the themes being offered is a special environmental ecological theme touching on the wonder and beauty of God's creation and our response and responsibility to each other, our world and to our creator God. It will be a day with a lot of hands on activities in the beautiful grounds of Emmaus House and there will be also time for more quiet reflection, sharing and prayer experiences. If you would like to know more, please contact Emmaus House on: 0117 907 9950.

ARC colleagues have been able to enjoy at first hand the beauty and tranquility of the gardens at Emmaus. We recently held a team day there and all of us departed feeling soothed by the calm surroundings and uplifted by the inspiring views – not to mention the tasty vegetarian food. For more details about Emmaus House and the workshops they offer – they have a fantastic selection focusing on ecology and creation - do please visit: <http://www.emmaushouse.org.uk/>

Sarum College, Salisbury

We'd also like to take this opportunity to wish Sarum College a happy anniversary. The College is celebrating 150 years of theological education, and it is some 15 years since it was founded as an ecumenical centre for Christian research and study.

If you have any stories or experiences to share with us, especially ideas on videos or purchasing, we would love to hear from you. Next time you'll hear some great news from Holland House in Evesham and Othona Bradwell in Essex. Meanwhile, have a happy summer.

With best wishes,

ARC

www.arcworld.org