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## **CONTENTS**

### **THE FAITH IN WATER CONFERENCE LETTER FROM BISHOP DECLAN LANG IDEAS FOR YOUR SCHOOL ECOWEEK FROM PRIOR PARK COLLEGE CHANCE TO STUDY STORM PETREL BIRDS IN PORTUGAL**

Welcome to our summer newsletter. Last weekend I was watering my newly planted home vegetable garden – the purple carrots are just reaching their peak and the rocket has run to flower because I forgot to water them. We don't have a hose, and as I hauled the watering cans to the vegetable area it was a chance to meditate on how fortunate many of us are that the act of carrying water in this country is usually associated with the luxury of spare time and growing things. Our water is drinkable from the tap, and most of us are on the mains.

But in many parts of the world it is a much more complex issue. Much more complex, much more broad, and for many groups who want to help, so confusing that they move their focus to something more manageable. It affects billions of people, the problems are horrendous, it involves a wide number of necessary strategies, issues and solutions, and the cost of not sorting it is a great deal of suffering. Here at ARC these complexities are very much in our minds as we're all busy preparing for the world's first Faith in Water Conference on July 5-7<sup>th</sup> – concentrating on the impact of water and sanitation issues on children, and the role that faiths can play in solving the problems. We're holding it in the lovely Sarum College in Salisbury, a Christian College and Retreat Centre just next to the Cathedral.

We have theologians and teachers from seven key traditions – Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Zoroastrianism – as well as top water experts from UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank, Dutch Government and DfID, and three entrepreneurs in water-related areas. And we will have a Naiade on display from the Netherlands: if you haven't seen it, it's a blue machine that looks like a tardis, and which can provide schools of 1000 students with 2.5 litres of safe drinking water a day per person for less than a penny a week each. I'll be testing it with pond water, and drinking it, to see whether it can really keep the water safe. Raising money for it might be a nice twinning project for UK schools (See [www.cleanwaternow.nl](http://www.cleanwaternow.nl))

The work we're doing made me think that water, faith and children might be an inspiring subject for lessons, assemblies and activities in your schools. Some of the stories and the accounts of schools in places like Kenya, Indonesia, India and El Salvador much of the information will be downloadable from [www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org) next month, but in the meantime I thought I'd share with you the beginning of the paper by Dr Mary Grey,

leading Catholic theologian and cofounder of the charity *Wells for India*. (See <http://tinyurl.com/npb8d2> for their education outreach).

*“My relationship with water starts at home, with the clear, flowing water outside the door, the chalk streams of the River Test that journeys on into Southampton Water. It is a relationship nourished by the central place that Christian faith gives to the principle, “water gives life.” But that relationship takes on greater urgency when I am journeying through the drought-prone state of Rajasthan, India, as I have been for more than 20 years, with the Charity Wells for India, that I helped to found. There I am continually struck by the relationship between water and life.*

*Rajasthan is one of the poorest states of India. Women’s and girls’ lives are haunted by the search for water, as they are forced to walk ever-increasing distances in search of it, when wells dry up. There is no aspect of life that is not affected: health is seriously damaged by water-related diseases; agriculture becomes almost impossible in a drought causing hunger in both people and animals. Men migrate in search of work and because income is so low, women are left to look after villages; the debt to the moneylender rises to an impossible level.*

*So how can Christianity have any helpful message here? The village people of rural Rajasthan in these remote areas are a mixture of tribal, Scheduled and Unscheduled castes, including Dalits, (former Untouchables), with a few Muslims, Jains and Sikhs. Our partners are influenced by Gandhi and his focus on the poorest peoples. What brought Christian faith central for our group was, early one morning, at prayer in an Ashram in the Thar Desert, when our Gandhian leader, Lakshmi Tyagi, paused and said to us: “normally we now have the teachings of Gandhi to inspire us: because you are here, let us have the teachings of Jesus!”*

In this edition of the Catholic Schools Eco Newsletter we also have a supportive letter from Bishop Declan Lang of Clifton, who has recently become the Catholic Bishop of Environment and Justice, as well as an update about Prior Park College in Bath, which has some inspiring ideas about what to do in an Eco week, and a gap year or vacation idea for older students who might like to join a Christian organisation arranging research into the activities of Portugal’s storm-petrel birds.

Next time we’ll tell you about Veggiedag – no meat day – in Ghent, which has recruited Belgian schools to join the movement in September, and might be inspiring for Catholic Schools wanting to reduce their meat consumption, in a reinvention of the old fish-on-Fridays tradition. We also hope to give you an update on the progress of Clifton’s Faith and Environment in Schools project, which the Diocese hopes might be a model for Catholic Dioceses around the country, raising issues of what it actually means to be a Catholic school trying

to encourage its children to have a right relationship with nature, in order that they might grow up to have a right relationship with God.

## **1. Bishop Declan Lang's letter to the Catholic EcoSchool network**

Dear Teachers, Helpers and others

I am writing to say how much I support the idea of sharing ideas and examples through an environmental newsletter such as this one, aimed at all our Catholic schools.

It is so important that we help our children and young people re-connect with the natural world and give them a sense of joy and responsibility towards all of life. How we live, what we use, what we eat and what we throw away are now essential topics for discussion and awareness because, as we all know, the natural world is under increasing strain from our often very wasteful lives.

It is wrong to pass onto the next generation a feeling that the earth is a problem. It is far from a problem; it is a source of nourishment, resources, joy, inspiration and spiritual insight. What we have to do is encourage the next generation to love the earth and to use their creativity, energy and talents to help it, and ourselves, flourish.

In these ever worrying times of economic and environmental insecurity it is important we re-visit and re-invigorate our basic Catholic principles of finding God through a simple, holy and joyful life that is not dependent on over-consumption and gaining increasing wealth. God will work in our lives if we find time for simplicity and prayer, love and friendship and respect for the value of all of life.

Earlier this year WWF published a survey which confirmed that faith schools are often the first and most active in the development of sustainable activities and practices. "It is evident that leaders who develop sustainability within their school do so with passion and conviction, underpinned by personal values. There is a philosophical and for many, a spiritual dimension to why these leaders engage sustainably," the report found.

I hope those of you who contribute to this venture will encourage more to send in their creative ideas and contributions so that we can celebrate all the excellent things already happening in our schools.

I also hope that more schools and colleges will join this network, so we can learn from each other what more we can do with our children to help protect this wonderful earth we are privileged to call home.

Bishop Declan Lang, Catholic Bishop for Environmental Justice

## **2. Thought of holding an Eco Week at your school? Here are some ideas**

Prior Park College in Bath found that it had scheduled its first ever "Eco-Week" during the coldest week of the year: but nevertheless they still managed to cut the school's energy and heating bill.

The aim was to motivate both pupils and staff in a fun way to make more progress towards sustainability – not only to reduce the school's carbon footprint during the week, but also to establish better stewardship of the site in the long term.

Here are some of their ideas:

- \* The Monday of was designated "Greenday" with everyone – staff and pupils - encouraged to dress with a green theme.
- \* Throughout the week, the "EcoPrior" committee acted as friendly Ecopolice; their role was to make sure that lights were turned off and that all members of the school community remained motivated.
- \* Newsflashes appeared on the school IT network naming and shaming departments who had left equipment turned on. In the boarding houses pupils were fined for leaving music playing in empty bedrooms; sixth form girls made a great effort to share laundry loads and use ecological washing products.
- \* Many academic departments ran projects with an environmental theme; the Geography department created three mini biomes,
- \* English students wrote poems in response to "An Inconvenient Truth" which was also screened during the week.
- \* Year Eight Science did work on recycling metals.
- \* Cars leaving the school site were charged a voluntary tax to raise funds for environmental projects.
- \* The language support department worked out how many trees we would save each year if we reduced the margin settings on all word processed documents. We hope to pursue a campaign nationally and internationally to pressure Microsoft to change its default settings
- \* The week was aimed at individual as well as community behaviour; all students and staff were encouraged to take on a green goal - to use our own bags when shopping, to recycle new items, to use the car less or to turn the heating down or off.

The initiative continues a tradition for environmental awareness begun several years ago by former student Tobias Nowlan, who established the EcoPrior environmental group and went on to win several national awards establishing a global society of environmental awareness - called "Ecoyouth".

Adapted from the Clifton Diocese web:

<http://www.cliftondiocese.com/prior-parks-eco-week>

<http://www.priorparkschools.co.uk>

### **3. Studying Stormies with A Rocha - for summer 2010**

Christian organisation A Rocha Portugal has been studying the European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* for 20 years. Each May and June they welcome volunteers of all ages from around the world, to take part in this exciting and topical research project. Small teams of 4-8 volunteers stay for 10 days each in Portugal, working alongside scientists from Cardiff University, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and A Rocha Portugal. No previous experience is necessary, just enthusiasm and a reasonable level of physical fitness. All necessary training is provided and student discounts are available. It would make a perfect gap year or summer adventure for older teenagers. Learn more about the research and how you can take part at the [stormies blog](http://stormies-online.blogspot.com/). (<http://stormies-online.blogspot.com/>)

<http://www.arocha.org/int-en/news/top-stories/4718-DSY.html>

Many schools are keen that we keep these newsletters going, and it is vital therefore that we hear from you. Because this is your newsletter, and if there are any stories that you would like to share about being a Catholic school engaging in environmental issues – or if there are any topics you'd like to see in future newsletters - please do contact us.

If you would like to contribute stories about the work your schools and colleges are doing or if you have any comments on the value of the newsletters, please contact: [nicki.mchugh@arcworld.org](mailto:nicki.mchugh@arcworld.org)

With very best wishes,

Victoria Finlay & Nicki McHugh  
The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC)  
[www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org)