

Alliance of Religions and Conservation: Educational resource 1b

Religions and Conservation – what are the connections?

Many factors give the religions of the world a huge potential to make an impact on behalf of the environment. These include:

- **Spiritual dimension:** For many people having a spiritual dimension in their relationship with the environment adds a greater sense of imperative to care for nature.
- **Religious obligation:** All religions identify the relationship between humanity and the natural world in their own way. The common thread is humanity's responsibility to respect the natural world and live harmoniously with it, conserving creation.
- **Education:** Religions manage hundreds of thousands of schools worldwide (the Christian Catholic Church alone has some 200,000) making an enormous opportunity for raising environmental awareness and the faithful's role in caring for it.
- **Community influence:** Religious leaders can be influential and respected figures in communities, able to encourage sustainable behaviour both by teaching and by setting a good example.
- **Political influence:** In many countries the cultural importance of religious organisations means that religious leaders can influence political debate and decision making. This can generate political support for environmentally positive policy making and investment by local and national governments.
- **Land owning:** ARC estimates that some 7-8% of the world's habitable surface is either owned or directly influenced by religious organisations. By adopting environmentally sustainable management practices they can contribute directly to environmental gains and model good practice for landowners.
- **Building management:** Religions worldwide own many buildings, so adopting 'green' principles like energy conservation or use of sustainable food production could have an enormous collective impact.