



## This fragile planet

When the first pictures of Earth taken from a spacecraft were shown, viewers gasped in awe. The earth looked so small and vulnerable in the vastness of space, a beautiful pale blue dot. With the realisation of its loveliness came an equally powerful awareness of its fragility and how its survival lies in the hands of ordinary men and women.

There have always been cultures that treated the planet with care. They lived close to the earth and their teachings are full of stories of the interdependence of all living things. They recognise that their own survival as human beings depends on the right relationship with the natural environment.

Unfortunately, until recently the most powerful nations throughout history have paid little attention to what they did to the planet. They were more concerned to exploit the riches of the earth for their own material wealth. There have always been those who recognised the logical consequences of misuse of natural resources, but few have listened to their warnings.

In the last years of the 20th century, many voices rose in defence of the environment. People risked their lives in the attempt to preserve wildlife, forests, tropical rainforests, wetlands and unique sites. They faced hostility, scorn, ridicule and threats.

Each year more and more species of animals and plant life become vulnerable, endangered and extinct. Too many people think that it does not matter: what is one more species of bird or one more forest? But the web of life is intricate and the variety of life forms is absolutely essential to human survival.

Maurice Strong, who chaired the Earth Summit, the 1992 United Nations Conference on the

Environment in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, stated bluntly that humanity is 'a species out of control' and that the next few decades will be decisive for our future. 'There are limits to the physical growth possible, but no limits to the human spirit,' he said.

It will take great strength of spirit to persevere in the struggle to save our fragile planet from the complex interests of multi-national business in its pursuit of ever-increasing profits. Human greed is destroying the natural world. Fortunately, however, all around the world individuals, governments, non-governmental organizations and the world's great religions are uniting in response. International organizations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature, Friends of the Earth and Global Action Plan promote sustainable living. They explain the nature of the interdependency of people with their environment. For example, how people choose to live in one country affects the quality of life of people in another. How people choose to live in one generation affects the quality of life of people in subsequent generations.

Environment groups encourage people to reduce their environmental impact by minimising waste, conserving energy and water and adopting sustainable transport habits. Why is this important?

### The energy challenge

Saving energy will help address one of the biggest environmental problems the world faces – global warming. Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is the main 'greenhouse gas'. It allows sunlight radiation through but it prevents it from escaping and so the earth gets warmer. Wherever fuel is burnt (gas, gasoline, petrol) such as in traffic pollution contribute to this. It is predicted that if emissions of carbon

## This fragile planet

dioxide continue at the present rate, levels will double by the year 2025 and as a result, the average temperature world-wide will increase by 1–2°C leading to a change in weather patterns: severe storms, rising sea levels, droughts and dramatic weather. In fact, the effects of global warming are already felt. Coastlines are changing. Islands such as the Maldives are threatened to sink below the rising sea level. Floods in countries as diverse as the USA, UK and Mozambique have had terrible consequences in terms of loss of life and habitats.

People are encouraged to think about their energy use and to adopt simple energy saving practices.

Industrialised countries produce more of these harmful gases and as other countries develop there will be more produced.

### The transport challenge

Most vehicles produce the following filthy five:

Carbon dioxide, the main 'greenhouse gas'. An average car produces approximately three tonnes of carbon dioxide each year. That is three times its weight.

Carbon monoxide that can lead to headaches, tiredness, breathing problems and stress. Cars produce 90% of the carbon monoxide in the air.

Nitrogen oxides that can lead to photochemical smog and acid rain. High levels of smog can cause irritation of the eyes and nose and increase the risk of pneumonia and bronchitis. Cars produce 45% of nitrogen oxides.

Sulphur Dioxide the effects of which are similar to nitrogen oxides.

Lead that can build up in the blood leading to brain damage.

People are encouraged to think about how much pollution their journeys create and to use their cars less.

### The water challenge

We cannot live without water. Rich and poor alike need water. But in the countries of the North, most people take water for granted. In Great Britain, for example, each person uses an average of 150 litres of water a day, that is about the equivalent of two baths. Our climate is changing and summer droughts are common, yet our use of water is growing. A household today uses 70% more water than 30 years ago. To meet this demand, water companies are taking more and more water from underground reservoirs and rivers, but rivers are drying up and running low.

It is estimated that over one billion people in the world still lack access to safe water to drink. Two billion people do not have basic sanitation. The World Health Organization states that 80% of all sickness and disease in the world is caused by unsafe water supplies. Typhoid, dysentery, cholera and bilharzia are contracted from unsafe water whilst carrying heavy water in pots and buckets can damage the neck, head and spine. In many countries of the Southern Hemisphere, collecting water is women's work, even if that means missing school.

Using water wisely is important for the environment and for the economy. It is also important for global stability.

There are many other environmental challenges that face us all at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Exploring these challenges can in itself be a part of our spiritual journey. It encourages reflection on the interdependence of all living things. It makes us realise that care of people and care of the planet go hand in hand. It makes us think beyond the here and now to the future. It challenges our priorities. Is the quality of life for all preferable to a higher standard of living for some? For people of faith, maintaining and sustaining environmental by sustainable lifestyles is also a religious responsibility.



## Religion and ecology

What do the great religions of the world have to say about the environmental crisis? And even more importantly, what are they doing about the current state of the environment?

In 1986, The World Wide Fund for Nature International (WWF) invited five of the major world religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism – to come to Assisi in Italy, birthplace of the Christian saint of ecology, St Francis, to share what each faith had to say about nature. At Assisi, the five faiths made a commitment to act on their teachings and to make ecology, conservation and the environment a focus for their actions and their prayers.

Following the Assisi conference, four other faiths joined: the Baha'is, the Sikhs, the Jains and the Taoists.

By 1995, over 120,000 religiously based environmental projects were operating world-wide. In Japan, and then England, leaders from the nine religions and conservationists along with leaders from the banking and media worlds, attended the Summit on Religions and Conservation. From the renewed commitment to ecological programmes came the new international structure known as the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC).

Each religious community has its own reasons for being concerned about the state of the planet. Those reasons spring from their beliefs that point to a need to care for the planet Earth. At the Assisi Conference, the major faiths issued authoritative statements on ecology and nature. They learned from each other and from conservation organizations. They have since put what they learned into practice through practical conservation projects and programmes of environmental education. As a result, the ecological message reaches millions of people.

### Extracts from the Assisi Declarations, Assisi 1986<sup>1</sup>

#### Buddhism

'We regard our survival as an undeniable right. As co-inhabitants of this planet, other species too have this right for survival. And since human beings as well as other non-human sentient beings depend upon the environment as the ultimate source of life and wellbeing, let us share the conviction that the conservation of the environment, the restoration of the imbalance caused by our negligence in the past, be implemented with courage and determination.

#### Christianity

'Man's dominion cannot be understood as licence to abuse, spoil, squander or destroy what God has made to manifest his glory. That dominion cannot be anything other than a stewardship in symbiosis with all creatures.....At the risk of destroying himself, man may not reduce to chaos or disorder, or, worse still, destroy God's bountiful treasures.'

#### Hinduism

'The Hindu viewpoint on nature is permeated by a reverence for life, and an awareness that the great forces of nature – the earth, the sky, the air, the water and fire – as well as various orders of life including plants, and trees, forests and animals, are all bound to each other within the great rhythms of nature. The divine is not exterior to creation, but expresses itself through natural phenomena. In the *Mudaka Upanishad* the divine is described as follows:

*Fire is his head, his eyes are the moon and sun;  
The regions of space are his ears, his*

## Religion and ecology

*voice the revealed Veda;  
The wind is his breath, his heart is the entire  
universe;  
The earth is his footstool, truly he is the  
inner soul of all.'*

The natural environment has received the close attention of the ancient Hindu scriptures. Forests and groves were considered sacred, and flowering trees received special reverence. Just as various animals were associated with gods and goddesses, different trees and plants were also associated in the Hindu pantheon. The *Mahabharata* says that 'even if there is only one tree full of flowers and fruits in a village, that place becomes worthy of worship and respect.'

## Islam

The essence of Islamic teachings is that the entire universe is God's creation. Allah makes the waters flow upon the earth, upholds the heaven, makes the rain fall and keeps the boundaries between day and night. The whole of the rich and wonderful universe belongs to God, its maker. It is God who created the plants and the animals in their pairs and gave them the means to multiply. Then God created mankind – a very special creation because mankind alone was created with reason and the power to think and even the means to turn against the Creator. Mankind has the potential to acquire a status higher than that of the angels or sink lower than the lowliest of the beasts.'

'For the Muslim, mankind's role on earth is that of a *khalifa*, viceregent or trustee of God. We are God's stewards and agents on Earth. We are not masters of this Earth, it does not belong to us to do what we wish.....The *khalifa* is answerable for his/her actions, for the way in which he/she uses or abuses the trust of God.'

## Judaism

'There is a tension at the centre of the Biblical tradition, embedded in the very story of creation itself, over the question and power of stewardship.....man was given dominion over nature, but he was commanded to behave towards the rest of creation with justice and compassion. Humanity lives, always, in tension between his power and the limits set by conscience.'

## Projects

Each of the religions has sought to give practical expression to their beliefs about nature through a range of conservation and environmental education projects. Examples follow:

## Buddhism

*Cambodia: Shante Sena Forestry Association*

This is a community based forestry project that integrates Buddhist and traditional beliefs. The amount of forest cover in Cambodia has fallen from 73% to 40% in the last 20 years. The Shante Sena educated local villagers and Buddhist monks and nuns in tree planting. 150,000 trees have been planted. It educates villagers about the importance of protecting natural resources and the links between environmental destruction and the irregular rains.

## Christianity

*UK: The Sacred Land Project*

There is a long tradition in Christianity of valuing the natural world as an expression of God's love. However, the importance of valuing the land from a religious perspective seems to have been lost by many. The Sacred Land

## Religion and ecology

Project is a five year scheme (April 1997–March 2002) that aims to restore the spiritual and environmental significance of these special or sacred sites: shrines, wells, pilgrimage routes.

### Hinduism

#### *India: The Vrindavan Conservation Project*

Vrindavan, the pastoral playground of Krishna, is one of the most important pilgrimage centres of India. The pressures on the environment are huge and since 1991, WWF India has worked with Vrindavan's people to address this. Over 2000 traditional trees and bushes have been planted, two plant nurseries established, over 10,000 saplings distributed to residents and ashrams. Two parks have been created, fenced and given water supply. Environmental education programmes for community and civic authorities are conducted.

### Islam

#### *Jordan: Al al-Bayt University Projects*

Al al-Bayt is an international Islamic University that focuses on the international dimension of Islam and provides the focus for cross-cultural and inter-faith dialogue. The University is conducting projects in the areas of reforestation, conservation and biodiversity, water management and wastewater treatment. It runs an Environmental education programme and is researching contemporary scientific environmental understanding with teachings in the Qur'an.

### Judaism

#### *USA: The Development of the Environmental Sabbath*

This is an initiative of Jewish groups in the USA led primarily by the World Jewish Congress and the Union of American-Hebrew Congregations in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme. It encourages people to make one Sabbath each year the focus of environmental education, fundraising and action preferably on Rosh Hashanah, traditionally regarded as the celebration of the birthday of the world. An annual environmental Sabbath pack is produced and distributed.

<sup>1</sup> These declarations are written in exclusive language but refer to men and to women.



## Sustainable development

### What is education for sustainable development?

The world is changing rapidly and many of these changes are the result of human decisions. We need to learn how and why change happens and how the actions we take today will affect our own and other people's lives in the future. It is increasingly obvious that we live in one world where our lives are connected to those of others across the globe. How we live in one country affects how others can live in another. For example, the pollution that we create in one country due to over use of energy resources, impacts on the quality of life in countries right across the world. The fact people expect to buy bananas cheaply all year round in the Northern Hemisphere, does not take into account that the farmers who grow them in the countries of the Southern Hemisphere who should expect to be paid a fair wage.

There are no set rules to achieve sustainability. We have to monitor what we do, discuss options and work together for the best possible sustainable future for all and for the planet. Co-operation is essential if we are to survive.

### The descending spiral

Inappropriate development...

- Impacts on the ENVIRONMENT
- Undermines HEALTH
- Inhibits DEVELOPMENT.

### The ascending spiral

Sustainable development...

- Improves the ENVIRONMENT
- Sustains DEVELOPMENT
- Increases HEALTH

A millennium message from the President of WWF-UK, HRH Princess Alexandra

*'I hope that the dawn of the new millennium will bring with it an even greater awareness among us all that the Earth's resources are not infinite, and that each of us must embrace development and lifestyles that meet the needs of people today without compromising the needs of future generations.'*

### The waste option

We all create litter and waste. Unfortunately, we do not always think about what we do with it. At best we put it in a bin and forget about it. At worst, we drop it on the ground or dump it out at sea and forget about it.

Most countries either bury their waste in landfill sites or burn their waste. Burying waste is harmful to the environment because toxic gases can escape through the earth and can pollute rivers and streams. Countries are actually running out of landfill space and so it is very expensive to bury waste too.

Burning waste can also be damaging to the environment. Smoke, gases and toxic ash are released and these are harmful both to the environment and to people's health.

## Sustainable development

Over 70% of household waste can be either recycled or composted. Some countries have better recycling facilities than others. But everyone can compost. Everyone can think about reducing the number of disposable items that they buy. Everyone can think about reusing items rather than simply throwing them away.

Remember the waste hierarchy: REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE, REMEMBER!

### Stop ocean dumping

In the 1970s, industry and certain governments regarded the world's oceans as convenient out-of-sight and out-of-mind dumping grounds. Since the 1970s public and political perceptions have changed towards the idea of sustainable development and the recognition of industrial responsibility. This means that potential polluters have to deal with their waste rather than simply dump it.

This view on environmental and industrial policy has steadily gained support over the years as witnessed by the development of international conventions controlling and banning dumping at sea. Many but not all countries are signatories to the London and OSPAR Conventions (Oslo and Paris, 1992 ~ for the Protection of the Marine Environment

of the North–East Atlantic) that prohibit the dumping of radioactive waste, sewage sludge, fish waste, dredged material, vessels and platforms and other structures at sea, inert inorganic geological material, iron, steel and concrete. Nevertheless dumping does continue despite strong evidence of environmental damage. This should not continue and pressure needs to be put on national governments to prosecute offenders and to ensure that dumping stops.

### A spiritual journey

What has sustainable development to do with spirituality? Sustainable development is of spiritual relevance because it is about how we care for people and care for the planet. It is about the sharing of resources and about our responsibilities to one another and to the earth. We can approach world development from a number of perspectives. On one level it is about economic progression, but it is also a process whereby we create conditions that lead to wholeness, fulfilment and quality of life for all people in all places. Wholeness and fulfilment are spiritual values that are shared by people of all faiths.



## Women and the environment

The management of natural resources is of international concern and yet interest in the environment has not always included an understanding of the role of women. In the past, development assistance to countries of the Southern Hemisphere has often failed to reach women in rural areas. Women suffer for the following reasons:

- Lack of access to technical education and training, credit and funding
- Lack of input into planning and decision-making processes
- Lack of ownership and tenure rights to land, trees, water and other natural resources
- Unfair distribution of goods and services supplied from natural resources
- Differing perceptions between men and women about types and allocations of resource use.
- Agricultural development programmes that focus mainly on men
- Lack of knowledge or false assumptions about the role of women in agriculture.

In most countries of the Southern Hemisphere, women have prime responsibility for the household and for income generation. It is their role to cook, clean, care for children, grow food and earn money to pay for school fees, clothes and daily life, therefore, much that women do has a very direct effect on the environment.

Environmental issues that directly affect women are:

- Deforestation (collecting firewood for fuel and warmth is women's work)
- Access to and control over water (searching for water is women's work)

- Overgrazing of land leading to soil degradation (caring for cattle and growing crops is women's work)

It could be argued that women in developing countries contribute to the destruction of the environment through the collection of firewood and grazing of animals. It is generally agreed that poverty, especially in developing countries, has led to some environmental disasters.

The environmental costs are now acknowledged.

*Women in Development* divisions in many aid organizations aim to improve the lives of women through income-generation, literacy and education programmes, credit and co-operative schemes. NGOs, government and national donors are encouraged to have a gender component to every project. In this context, natural resource management such as forest conservation, social forestry, soil conservation and improvement, water capture and distribution and watershed management have to do two things: focus on women and also recognise that women are integrated into the system within which they live. Once again, issues to do with women and the environment are about quality of life, wholeness and fulfilment. These are spiritual concerns.

An important element of the Girl Guide/Girl Scout method is contact with nature. This is traditionally gained through camping. Camping activities enable an appreciation of the natural world. This is essential at a time when the environment is under threat. The environmental theme is now strong in many Girl Guide/Girl Scout activities. Indeed, WAGGGS promotes a keen involvement in environmental issues world-wide. Girl Guides

## Women and the environment

and Girl Scouts are involved in community development projects that include care for the environment. Two examples are the planting of trees and shrubs to prevent soil erosion and protecting fresh water resources. As part of its theme Building World Citizenship – *The WAGGGS' Perspective*, WAGGGS' ten million members world-wide are encouraged to develop projects that revitalize, replenish and recycle thereby putting something back into the planet.

## Fair Trade

How and where we spend our money has a major impact on the environment, yet trying to get information and facts to help us to make the best possible decisions is very difficult. The advertising industry constantly bombards us with a mass of images promoting one product or another. Large claims are shouted from the roof-tops yet actual facts are conspicuous by their absence.

Consumers have enormous power and companies know this. For example, ozone-depleting CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons) were phased out of aerosols quickly when manufacturers saw the shift in public attitude.

### Fair trade

As consumers, we also have the power to buy goods that are traded fairly. We need to be informed so that we purchase products that give a just return to those who have produced them. This is called fair trade. Fair trade ensures that people are paid a just wage for the product that they produce irrespective of fluctuation on the world markets. It ensures that small scale producers get decent wages and a fair price for the goods they produce and can earn their living under fair conditions.

### Colonial legacy

Many of the poorer countries of the world entered the world's trading markets under the colonial system. They produced tropical goods and raw materials such as sugar, rubber, cotton, coffee and fruit that are often low cost in return for importing manufactured or processed goods that are often at high cost. The legacy of the colonial system remains. Poor countries remain impoverished producers rather than rich processors.

### Trade barriers

Coffee farmers and plantation farmers earn only eight pence in every £1.00 sterling that is spent on the final product. The profit is made in the rich industrialised nations where processing takes place. For example, European Community (EU) trade policies prevent countries in the Southern Hemisphere from getting a better deal. These countries are confined to producing raw materials since they can sell them to the EU cheaply, whilst any processed products they might wish to make and sell face much higher barriers. In short, the international trading system was devised by the rich to suit their needs; it ignores those of the poor.

For many people in developing countries, selling coffee is their main livelihood. Yet they remain vulnerable to extreme price fluctuations and trade barriers. Organizations such as Traidcraft and OXFAM ensure that producers are paid a fair price. Money is used for the products, to improve the nutrition of children, to send them to school, to improve the conditions in the community and in general to dignify people's lives. Ordinary shoppers can make a difference by buying products that have been fairly traded. Fairly traded products such as tea, coffee, clothes, jewellery, honey, baskets, handicrafts, furniture, coffee, peanuts, raisins, rice, cereal and cards are available through specialist shops, but also through supermarkets where the goods are marked with the Fairtrade logo.



## Fair Trade

Trading for a fairer world means:

- Paying people in the Third World fair prices
- Giving them financial credit when they need it
- Working together for a better future.

Fair trade is about how we treat people. It is about justice. These are spiritual concerns.

### World Trade Organization

The World Trade Organization (WTO) came into being in the mid 1990s. It replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The WTO is an arm of the United Nations. It comprises 134 member countries and many other countries wish to join. Its essential function is the regulation of global

markets. In December 1999, the WTO met in Seattle, USA to examine world trade agreements. Thousands of protestors converged on Seattle and blamed free trade for the wide economic disparity between rich nations and poor. Whilst free trade is allowed to continue, rich countries can pay low prices for goods to countries that are desperate for any income and that can keep their prices low by paying their workers low wages. The Seattle meetings collapsed, partly because of the protestors' action and partly due to the insistence of the USA and its allies that labour standards (minimum wages, a ban on child labour, working hours and conditions) be included in trade agreements. Countries of the South disagreed with this point of view, because this would mean higher costs for the production of items and this would inevitably lead to unemployment.



## Action on waste

### Purpose

To think about lifestyle choices, namely waste.

### Materials needed

Materials: plastic bottle, glass bottle, crisp packet, apple core, sweet wrapper, paper written on one side, newspaper, tin can, tissue, yoghurt pot, envelope, pen, battery, plastic bag, plastic cup, jumper, shoe, clean disposable nappy (and anything else that is culturally relevant).

Gloves and large bags for collecting litter.

### What to do

Brainstorm answers around the following questions:

1. What is waste?
2. Where does it go?

Find out local answers e.g. landfill sites, incineration, rubbish tips, burnt locally, left lying around

3. Why do we need to cut down on our waste?
  - Throwing away too much and running out of space to bury it
  - Waste disposal is pollution
  - Wasting scarce resources
  - Financial costs

4. How do we save waste?

### THE WASTE HIERARCHY

**REDUCE:** the first crucial step. Think about what you buy. Buying quality or fewer disposable items has a major impact on the amount of rubbish we throw away.

**REUSE:** reusing, refilling and repairing products lessens the amount of rubbish in bins or lying around the landscape.

**RECYCLE:** recycling means using waste or rubbish as new, raw materials. Sometimes the waste will be used to produce different things e.g. recycled plastic bottles can become drain-pipes, fence posts, telephones and trousers! It takes 11 plastic bottles to make one pair of trousers.

**REMEMBER:** think about what you are doing!

5. Invite participants to divide the pile of materials into three categories: reduce, reuse, recycle. Go through each item to see whether people are either reducing, reusing or recycling it.
6. Suggest to people that they hold a litter walk. Decide to clean up a certain area. You will need bags to collect rubbish and gloves.
7. Invite people to write a waste policy for the group.



## Action on water

### Purpose

To think about lifestyle choices, namely water

### Materials needed

Paper/pens or flipchart/blackboard

### What to do

Water is an important resource. It has unique properties that have enabled life as we know it to develop on this planet. The raw material may appear to be plentiful but world-wide it is in increasingly short supply. Water shortages and drought are a daily reality for about one third of the world's population. In many parts of the world water is, literally, a matter of life and death.

Finding new sources of water is not an option. Forests are cut down so springs dry up. Underground lakes that date from prehistoric times are also drying up fast. Rivers are drying up and crippled with pollution. The cost of desalinating sea water is prohibitively high.

It is predicted that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, nations will go to war over water, or lack of it. It is important to save water and to reduce water pollution.

1. Get the group to brainstorm a list of all the ways in which they have used water today.
2. Working alone, invite each person to list three things that she can do to save water. Share ideas.
3. Working alone, invite each person to list three things she can do to reduce water pollution. Share ideas.
4. Invite people to write a water policy for your particular organization or group.



## Action on energy

### Purpose

To think about lifestyle choices, namely energy.

### Materials needed

Paper/pens or flipchart/blackboard.

### What to do

Energy is the capacity to do work. You cannot see it. But it can be used efficiently. It is present in everything – food, candles, people – but not always convertible into useful forms. Where a material's calorific energy is high, we use it as a fuel.

It is important to save energy for two reasons: financial and environmental. If we use less energy we automatically use less fuel and therefore save money.

Most forms of energy have a cost to the environment. Burning fossil fuels not only depletes non-renewable energy resources, it also produces carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming. It is believed that global warming is responsible for dramatic changes in the world's climate. The world is running out of energy resources. We consume too much and we waste too much.

Invite participants to discuss the following questions together:

1. What is energy?
2. Why is it important to save energy?
3. Get the group to brainstorm all the ways in which they have used energy today.
4. Working alone, get each member to list three things that she can do to save energy. Share ideas.
5. Invite people to write an energy policy for the group.



## Action on shopping

### Purpose

To think about lifestyle choices, namely shopping

### Materials needed

Pens/ paper or flipchart/blackboard

### What to do

You can buy products from developing countries that are good buys for you, for the producers and for the environment. This is called fair trade.

1. Working alone, invite participants to make a list of the food items that they buy on a regular basis. Indicate where they buy each item and the country it comes from.

Divide participants into groups to consider the following questions:

2. Do you ever stop to think where or how an item is produced?
3. Do fair trading issues influence the decisions you make when you go shopping?
4. If you are producing goods for which you are paid a fair price, what difference has this made to your life and to the life of your family?
5. Do you buy what you want or what you need? What influences your decision to buy something?
6. How can the group take this issue further?



## Spirituality and the environment

### Purpose

To examine the link between spirituality and the environment

### Materials needed

Paper, pens, paints, crayons, candle, matches, bowl of fruit, bowl, jar of water

### What to do

Invite participants to brainstorm answers around the following questions:

1. Why do you think it is important to care about the environment?
2. What is the connection for you between the environment and spirituality?
3. In many cultures and faiths, the natural world is understood as an expression of the divine. The following meditation reveals this:

*Apprehend God in all things,  
For God is in all things.*

*Every single creature is full of God  
And is a book about God.*

*Every creature is a word of God.*

*God's peace  
Prompts service among brothers and sisters.  
In that way one creature  
Sustains another,  
One enriches the other,  
And that is why  
All creatures are interdependent.*

(Meister Eckhart)

Many faiths and cultures give thanks to God for creating the Earth:

*African Prayer from Zimbabwe*

*Thou givest of rain to humanity.  
Hear us Lord!*

*Show mercy when we beseech thee, Lord,  
Thou art on high with the spirits of the great.*

*Thou raisest the grass-covered hills  
Above the earth, and createst the river,  
Gracious One.*

Invite people to draw a picture or to write a poem, a prayer or a song that expresses care for the environment.

4. Meditation<sup>1</sup>

Theme: sacredness of all creation, its oneness and interdependence: praise and gratitude

Prepare a small table with a candle, a bowl of fruit, a bowl and a jar of water. (You can place all these on the floor if you prefer).

All sit round it in a circle; the bowl of fruit is passed round the circle so that each person can take and enjoy a fruit of the earth.

The leader then invites anyone who wishes to come up and pour a drop of water into the bowl, mentioning some part of creation for which they wish to give thanks.

Throughout there can be background music or suitable songs can be sung.

5. You may like to end this by saying together the *Ra*

<sup>1</sup> Taken from *Renewing the Earth* CAFOD, London 1989



## The Rainbow Covenant

### Purpose

For people to take responsibility for environmental destruction

### Materials needed

Coloured ribbons; coloured scarves or coloured materials (all optional); *The Rainbow Covenant* (below)

### What to do

The Rainbow Covenant was designed after the Assisi conference in 1986 when the World Wide Fund for Nature brought together five major world religions to share what each faith had to say about nature.

The covenant can be used by anyone, religious or not. Churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, women's groups and others are invited to use it as a way of publicly and personally taking ethical responsibility not only for nature but also for the destructiveness of our own species.

In the Jewish and Christian Bible, God commands Noah to build an ark to save species on earth from extinction when God sends a great flood to punish humankind. When the flood abates, God makes a covenant, the first covenant recorded. It is made not only with Noah but also with all life on earth, in the sea and in the sky. God promises never to wantonly destroy life again and sets the rainbow in the sky as a witness to this promise.  
(Genesis 9)

Today it is we humans who wantonly destroy life. So now we must make a covenant with all life: not to wantonly destroy.

Invite participants to make a rainbow bracelet by weaving together the different coloured ribbons. Tie them onto each other's wrists. Alternatively, make a huge rainbow by weaving together the different scarves or pieces of cloth.

Standing in a circle, all say *The Rainbow Covenant* together:

### *The Rainbow Covenant*

*Brothers and sisters in creation, we covenant this day with you and with all creation yet to be;  
With every living creature and all that contains and sustains you.  
With all that is on earth and with the earth itself;  
With all that lives in the waters and with the waters themselves;  
With all that flies in the skies and with the sky itself.  
We establish this covenant, that all our powers will be used to prevent your destruction.  
We confess that it is our own kind who put you at risk of death.  
We ask for your trust and as a symbol of our intention we mark our covenant with you by the rainbow.  
This is the sign of the covenant between ourselves and every living thing that is found on the earth.*