

Saturday 8 February: *Jesus and the Earth: The Gospel and the future of the environment.*

A day conference at the University of Gloucestershire's Francis Close Hall Campus, Swindon Road, Cheltenham, 9.30am - 5.30pm. Run jointly by the John Ray Initiative and the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Gloucestershire. Details from David Thistlethwaite at dthistlethwaite@glos.ac.uk.

Sunday 16 February: Parish Eucharist, SS Mary & John Church, Cowley Road, Oxford, 10.30am. The Bishop of Oxford will preach and present the church with a Parish Pump Priming Award for churchyard restoration. See article inside for details. Everyone welcome. Contact Ruth Conway on 01865 723085 or m.r.conway@virgin.net.

Monday 17 February: Sage prayer meeting, 14A Osler Road, Headington, 7.30pm. Contact Jennifer on 01865 768436.

Friday 21 February: Sage bring & share meal followed by a discussion on food issues, 42 Morrell Avenue, 7.30pm. Is organic really the best for us and the land? What's the latest news on GM crops? Do you know where the majority of our rice is grown and why it's an issue? Please bring any thoughts or information on issues important to you. Contact Clare on 01865 242588 or can@freenet.co.uk.

Wednesday 26 February: *Planning the Future with AChRE*, Old Marston Church Hall, Oxford, 7.30pm. Meeting of A Christian Response to the Environment. Contact Adrian Hopwood at adrian@proceff.f9.co.uk.

Friday 7 - Saturday 8 March: *Women's voices from around the world: Caring for the earth*, United College of the Ascension, Selly Oak, Birmingham, 6.00pm Friday - 5.00pm Saturday. A course under the auspices of USPG. Local Oxfordshire contact: Janet Warren on 01865 376266.

Saturday 15 March: Sage work party, Boundary Brook Nature Park, 2.00-6.00pm. Refreshments included. Contact Clare on 01865 242588 or can@freenet.co.uk.

Sunday 16 March: Boundary Brook Nature Park open day, 2.00-5.00pm.

Monday 17 March: Sage prayer meeting, 150 Leiden Road, 7.30pm. Contact Caroline on 01865 432600 or davesteel@ntlworld.com.

Sunday 13 April: Memorial service for Maggie Stevens at Nuneham Courtenay Arboretum. An oak tree has been planted in memory of Maggie in the bluebell wood. Please come to share memories, anecdotes and poems. Meet in the car park at 2.30pm. Please note that there is now a fee for parking. Ring Caroline on 01865 432600 or davesteel@ntlworld.com if you would like to meet beforehand for a pub lunch.

Monday 21 April: Sage walk on the Ridgeway. Meet at 10.30am at 2 Edington Place, Grove. Bring a packed lunch. Dinner will be a bring & share at the Hodson's after the walk. Contact Martin and Margot on 01235 768406 or info@sageoxford.org.uk.

Monday 28 April: Sage prayer meeting, 14A Osler Road, Headington. 7.30 pm. Contact Jennifer on 01865 768436.

The newsletter of Sage, a Christian environmental group in Oxford

February 2003

www.sageoxford.org.uk

ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT SPECIAL EDITION

Sustainable agriculture gives hope to the poor

Early in September last year we were fortunate to be able to visit the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) near Nasu Shiobara in central Japan. The ARI had been on Margot's list of places to visit for many years, as a friend of hers had worked there.

Founded in 1973 by the Rev. Toshihiro Takami and others, ARI provides training for rural leaders from the third world in sustainable agriculture. In thirty years ARI has trained approximately a thousand people from nearly fifty countries. ARI usually accepts up to 30 participants per year, mostly from Asia and Africa. The annual training programme begins in early April ending with graduation in December. As an institution ARI is rooted in the Christian faith, and every morning the participants gather for a service and time of sharing.

Whilst there we had a guided tour of the campus, and met a number of the staff including the newly appointed director, Koa Tasaka. We were particularly interested in the methods being developed at ARI for sustainable agriculture in the third world. For example, we saw experiments on a System



of Rice Intensification (SRI). Developed in Madagascar, SRI involves providing better growing conditions for root growth, principally by spacing the plants out more, and carefully controlling water supply. In some parts of the world results have been very promising, with at least doubled yields. For us the best part of the visit was to have the opportunity to share with pastors and development workers from around the world. Many of these would soon be returning to very difficult situations in their home countries. They need our prayers.

For more information see the ARI web site at www.ari.edu.

Martin and Margot Hodson

Sage members in JRI globalisation workshop

Three Sage members, Martin and Margot Hodson and I, attended a workshop organized by the John Ray Initiative (JRI) in London on 21 November, entitled *Globalisation and the global environment: the Christian response?*. The workshop was preceded by the AGM of the JRI. I have been on the board of the JRI for the last two years now, and I am very pleased that Margot has agreed to join the board also.

The workshop was open to the public and had a good turnout. Peter Heslam of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity asked whether such a thing as 'sustainable capitalism' was possible. He reviewed the nature of capitalism in the modern world and identified some of its shortcomings at least in its present form. One example of a problem with the present way the capitalist world operates is that 'natural capital' and services provided by the natural world are not accounted for.

Ruth Valerio spoke about the CRED, an organisation that works for justice for the world's poor through a variety of projects. Ruth spoke about the importance of a holistic view of mission, in which evangelism was linked with social responsibility and care for

creation; she also challenged us to live simply and resist consumerism. This was very pertinent as we were meeting at St. Paul's, Robert Adam Street, just a short walk from Oxford Street!

The final talk was given by Peter Carruthers, on behalf of Christopher Jones, on 'Corporate power, people and the land'. We heard some disturbing examples of the way farmers in very different parts of the world can fall foul of large corporations. A Canadian farmer was successfully sued by Monsanto because herbicide resistance genes from neighbouring GM crops were found in his rape crop as a result of cross contamination. A second example was the behaviour of some of the large banana producers towards their workers (further details on both at www.agriculture-theology.org.uk).

The workshop was very thought provoking and generated much discussion. Inevitably perhaps I found myself wondering what I should do. We may not be able to solve all the problems, but it is at least a start to be aware of the issues and to support fair trade and environment friendly business whenever we can.

Mike Morecroft

Food for thought

Is organic food really the best for us and the land? What's the latest news on GM crops? Do you know where the majority of our rice is grown and why it's an issue? We will be discussing these issues of food production at 42 Morrell Avenue on 21 February, appropriately enough after a bring & share meal. Please bring any thoughts or information on issues important to you. See the diary dates on the back page.

Sage Words online

Recently two people have asked to be taken off the *Sage Words* mailing list as they found the Sage Words on-line edition more convenient. We have recently obtained the software to produce PDF files, suitable for downloading directly from the web. If you would prefer to get Sage Words in this format, e-mail info@sageoxford.org.uk. Please note this does *not* mean we are about to discontinue the paper version!

Christian Concern for One World: caring for both people and planet

It sounds like a quiz question: what do efficient light bulbs, a human chain, Café 5065, and a close look at one's investments have in common? Answer: They all involve choices made to implement Gospel values – and they've all been part of Christian Concern for One World's ministry over the past ten years!

Christian Concern for One World (CCOW) is an ecumenical organisation, founded on a belief that the concerns for justice, peace, and the care of creation are Gospel values – and these concerns need to be lived out in our lives. CCOW has been actively engaging with the churches in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, and Buckinghamshire since 1989.

Over the years we have worked with churches and individuals to raise awareness of – and work out responses to – issues as diverse as energy use, third-world debt relief, fair trade (and the need for fairer trade rules), and ethical investment. The diversity of this list reflects our awareness that human poverty and environmental degradation are

locked in a vicious cycle, and that it is necessary to confront the causes of both.

CCOW has resources available for loan, including a full Eco-Congregations pack (for those considering joining), a small library of books looking at the theology of green issues and sustainable development, and our own *What Can I Do for the Planet?* an A4 leaflet edited by Canon Christopher Hall which handily summarizes numerous possibilities for personal action. Our website (www.ccow.org.uk) also includes a diary of events, many of them with an ecological focus, and materials for prayer and worship. We also work with partners to hold events exploring particular topics – most recently the complex web of questions surrounding the food we buy.

If you would like a partner in exploring an issue, want more general information or want to send details of an event you are holding, please get in touch at 01865 874778 or ccowinfo@fish.co.uk.

Maranda St John Nicolle

Bishop to present churchyard award

The Bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, will be presenting the SS Mary & John Church, Oxford with a Parish Pump Priming Award from the Conservation Foundation to help in the major effort to restore the churchyard. Sage has been pleased to help this project by providing a web page about it, www.sageoxford.org.uk/churchyard, where you can find more details. Thanksgiving and care for God's Creation will be the focus of SS Mary & John's Parish Eucharist on 16 February, when the Bishop will also be preaching. See the diary dates on the back page.

