

**Saturday 27 September:** Sage walk from Dorchester through Wittenham to Shillingford along the Thames Path and visit to Bridge House ([www.bridge-house.org.uk](http://www.bridge-house.org.uk)). Meet at 2.00pm in Dorchester or 4.00pm at Bridge House. Back early evening. For directions, travel information and more details contact Clare on 01865 242588 or [can@freenet.co.uk](mailto:can@freenet.co.uk). Please also let her know if you are coming by **20 September**. See article inside.

**Saturday 27 September:** *Land Use and Agriculture*. A day conference at Aylesbury Parish Church, 9.30am-3.00pm. Details and application form available at the Sage web site [www.sageoxford.org.uk/landuseagr](http://www.sageoxford.org.uk/landuseagr).

**Tuesday 30 September:** *European Christian Responses to Ecological Crises*. Meeting of A Christian Response to the Environment (AChRE), 7.30pm, Old Marston Church Hall, Elsfeld Road. Speaker: Ruth Conway. Contribution of £1 to £1.50 requested. Contact Adrian Hopwood on [adrian@proceff.f9.co.uk](mailto:adrian@proceff.f9.co.uk).

**Thursday 2 October:** Sage prayer meeting, 10.30am-12.00pm, 14A Osler Road, Headington. Contact Jennifer on 01865 768436 or [richardgunraj@supanet.com](mailto:richardgunraj@supanet.com).

**Saturday 11 October:** John Ray Initiative lifestyle consultation, St Andrew's Church, Linton Road, 11.00am-4.00pm, with the purpose of producing a briefing paper. Spaces for Sage contacts are limited to the first 10 who apply. Contact Margot Hodson on 01235 768406 or [margot@hodsons.org](mailto:margot@hodsons.org).

**Saturday 18 October:** Work party, Boundary Brook Nature Park, 1.30-4.00pm. Bring a picnic for lunch from 12.45pm. Jobs for all levels of energy, getting ready for the Open Day on **Sunday 19 October**. See the park in autumn colours. Contact Clare on 01865 242588 or [can@freenet.co.uk](mailto:can@freenet.co.uk).

**Friday 31 October - Saturday 1 November:** World Church Prayer day, 8.00pm Friday – 8pm Saturday. Organised by Sage member Margot Hodson, the theme is *Your Kingdom Come*.

**Thursday 6 November:** Sage prayer meeting, 10.30am-12.00pm, 150 Leiden Road, Headington. Contact Caroline on 01865 432600 or [davesteel@ntlworld.com](mailto:davesteel@ntlworld.com).

**Wednesday 19 November:** *Give us this day our daily germs*. Meeting of AChRE, 7.30pm, Old Marston Church Hall, Elsfeld Road. Speaker: Prof. John Grange. Contribution of £1 to £1.50 requested. Contact Adrian Hopwood on [adrian@proceff.f9.co.uk](mailto:adrian@proceff.f9.co.uk).

**Thursday 4 December:** Sage prayer meeting, 10.30am-12.00pm, 14A Osler Road, Headington. Contact Jennifer on 01865 768436 or [richardgunraj@supanet.com](mailto:richardgunraj@supanet.com).

**Saturday 13 December:** Sage stall at the Winter Green Fair, Oxford Town Hall. Contact [info@sageoxford.org.uk](mailto:info@sageoxford.org.uk).

**Thursday 1 January 2004.** Sage New Year's Day walk, Ridgeway. Meet 10.00am at 2 Edington Place, Grove. Bring sandwiches for the walk; we will return to Grove for an early evening meal. Contact Martin & Margot on 01235 768406 or [info@sageoxford.org.uk](mailto:info@sageoxford.org.uk).

The newsletter of Sage, a Christian environmental group in Oxford

September 2003

[www.sageoxford.org.uk](http://www.sageoxford.org.uk)

## GM crops: the questions for Christians

Over the summer, the government sponsored a debate on genetically modified crops, aiming to gather public opinion before they take the decision whether to allow the planting of GM crops in the UK this autumn.

What are the key questions? As Christians we must ask whether transferring genetic material from one organism to another is a good idea on ethical grounds. By doing so are we playing God? One can argue that we are not doing very much different to conventional plant breeding by crossing related organisms, but what about inserting genes from bacteria into plants, animals into plants or humans into plants? What is the limit, or is there none?

Despite lots of scare stories, at present there is little evidence that GM crops have harmed human health, and there are now grown in vast acreages in North America. However, we should remain vigilant.

There are far more concerns about environmental effects. In particular there is great difficulty in making sure that the genes stay in the crop. The evidence suggests that there is very high potential for transfer of genes from the crop to other species. Most GM crops that would be growing here if the UK government agreed have been made herbicide resistant, leading to fears that we might create a virtually unstoppable "super-weed". It may also encourage farmers to



spray more herbicides.

Perhaps the biggest concern is economic and political. A few very large companies hold the monopoly on both the herbicides and the GM crops - farmers buy both at the same time, and enter into a contract with the company. Are we are happy with our food chain being controlled in this way?

What are Christians doing? I feel that this is one debate where Christians should be involved, and many are, on both sides of the argument. In June we attended a big public debate in Dorchester Abbey, organised by the Rector, which many Christians attended. The vote was overwhelmingly against GM, with only four people in favour. Whatever the government decision, the debate will continue, and I hope Sage can help bring a Christian perspective to it.

*Adapted from a sermon by Martin Hodson*

# A taste of Northumbria (and tea) in Shillingford

Bridge House, Shillingford-on-Thames (near Wallingford), is the home of Rosemary and Philip Mader-Grayson. They run and are developing a small-holding, farm shop, tea rooms, B&B, caravan & camping site as well as a diversity of other activities, including a Barn Dance Band, felt making, and storytelling. There they have created and sustain a welcoming place of Christian hospitality and retreat. They are companions of the Northumbria Community, following the Community Rule of life, as well as being Affiliated Producers/Processors of the Wholesome Food Association, which promotes locally grown, chemical-free fruit, vegetables and meat, thereby strengthening local economies and communities. You can find more infor-

mation on their web site [www.bridge-house.org.uk](http://www.bridge-house.org.uk).

On Saturday 27 September we have arranged a Sage walk, which will include a visit to Bridge House. For the full walk, meet in Dorchester at 2pm for gentle 2-hour walk to Shillingford, including an optional ascent of Wittenham Clumps for great views. Alternatively, meet at Bridge House at about 4pm for tea (home-made cake etc!), followed by a 1-hour walk back to Dorchester along the Thames. Please contact me on 01865 242588 or [can@freenet.co.uk](mailto:can@freenet.co.uk) for directions, lifts, bus information (there is a regular service from Oxford), and to let me know numbers by a week before.

*Clare Newgass*

## Sage website reaches the world

Our website, [www.sageoxford.org.uk](http://www.sageoxford.org.uk), continues to be a useful resource for those interested in Christianity and the environment, and we recently had our 2000th visitor to the home page. We are now hosting pages for two other groups in the Oxford area: A Christian Response to the Environment (AChRE); and the SS Mary and John churchyard project. Enquiries come in from around the world. In July, a researcher from Harvard University wanted to do a profile of Sage for the Forum on Religion and Ecology (<http://environment.harvard.edu/religion>), which is attempting to catalogue faith and environment initiatives from around the world. We also had a lady from Poland contact us, wanting help to set up a Christian environmental group in her own country. So visit our website for all the latest news from Oxford and beyond!

## Congratulations!

There have been two happy events over the summer involving Sage members, for which we send our congratulations. Firstly, on 19 July, Mark Roberts married Yolanda Corley in Cambridge. You can find a photo of the happy couple on the Sage website. Then, on 15 August, Charlie Morecroft gave birth to her and Mike's first child, Matthew. Our love and best wishes to Mark, Yolanda, Mike, Charlie and Matthew.

## Note from the treasurer

Sage relies on donations from supporters to fund its work. If you would like to contribute, please send a cheque, payable to Sage, to Karl Wallendzusz, Sage Treasurer, 34 Binsey Lane, Oxford OX2 0EX. Thank you for your support.

# Cookham becomes an EcoCongregation

In considering some of the longer term issues it should be addressing, the Peace and Justice committee of Holy Trinity Church, Cookham decided that we should focus us on "sustainability" as a major challenge facing humanity. The reasons included:-

- Reminding ourselves that we are temporary custodians of God's creation and as such we have a responsibility to reinforce this message within our church and community.
- Although most of our congregation are alive to "green" issues, we wanted to provide a practical framework for individuals to play their part.
- Many people in our parish have influential roles in business, education and government. Encouraging those people to use their influence often just requires appropriate stimulus.

We soon came across EcoCongregation ([www.encams.org/ecocongregation](http://www.encams.org/ecocongregation)), a church environmental organisation, whose principles and objectives matched what we were trying to do and had developed a well thought-out, practical environmental responsibility programme. With enthusiastic support from our PCC to sign up, we launched our commitment with a sermon earlier this year by Terrie Robinson, our Curate, who presented a powerful and interesting perspective on this important issue.

We are still in the process of developing our targets and programme, with two strands of activity: one for our church as an organisation and the other for individuals. For the corporate church we have carried out the EcoCongregation audit, identifying a need to concentrate on energy policy. We are to carry out a detailed energy audit and



*Holy Trinity Church, Cookham*

our local authority has advised us how to attract grants for e.g. solar water heating, a ground source heat pump or wood chip boiler.

For individuals we plan to use the *New Internationalist's* 20-point programme "to help you kick your global guzzling habit"! A humorous and easy to follow poster shows how to embrace more environmentally responsible lifestyle habits - a really interesting and practical road map for individuals and families. We intend to challenge the congregation to audit their current habits and set themselves a goal for the coming 6 months. We will then check performance and produce a statistic to represent what contribution to reducing global warming the church has collectively made. This will be a rolling programme, which should encourage lots of families and households within our community to "do their bit"

We are conscious that we are starting a journey and there are many initiatives upon which we can build for our worship, church activities and community involvement in the years ahead.

*Chris Harris*