

## 9 LAND, FOOD AND MATERIALS

### Food and Community

The Holy Communion service began with Jesus sharing a meal with his disciples. Eating together was and is an important part of the Jewish way of life though for Christians the Eucharist is now usually a symbolic meal. Nevertheless we still often eat together in shared lunches, harvest suppers, Alpha courses, meetings, awaydays and conferences.

The food on our tables is often a tangible link with people in many parts of the world. Even a celebration of local food is likely to include some ingredients from elsewhere. And, in our society, offering a drink and something to eat is still a sign of welcome whether it is a cup of tea and a biscuit or buying someone a drink in a pub.

Food is at the heart of our worship and our culture, and is essential for our survival. It needs to be taken seriously.

### Food and Celebration

A life of simplicity is characterised by celebration and hospitality. We need to consider whether these are characteristics of our church worship and social life, and what part food can play in that. *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* includes materials for the Agricultural Year. It would be a shame if this was seen as simply applicable to rural areas. In some ways it is even more important that people who have little direct experience of food production are made aware of and celebrate the gift of food and the work that is involved in producing it.

### Land, Life and Prayer

The creation can be a means for our healing. In a culture where many people are for much of the time out of touch with the land, the weather, the seasons of the year and the life of plants and animals, it is important that the churches help people renew this essential contact. This can be done through meditative walks, gardening,, visits to farms and environmental centres, painting, watching or working with animals and birds, flower arranging, cooking, woodwork or nature rambles. There many ways that people can be encouraged to engage their senses creatively or reflectively with the world they are part of.

Many people do this anyway, and they think of it as a hobby. The church can help people realise that this is not something in contrast or conflict with their spiritual life but a part of it. And local churches can provide means or opportunities for people to share their experience and help others take part.

### Food Production

In their meetings and their communications churches can encourage and help people find out the extent to which the food they can buy is:

- Local
- Environmentally friendly
- Animal friendly
- Fairly traded

This can be done in food fairs, website links and magazine articles, in local forums with farmers and others sharing their experience and debating the issues, in talks in services and a number of other ways. There are many interconnected issues here and living responsibly involves being aware of what is involved. Simplicity is not the same as gullibility or naivety, but it involves being willing to question, learn and act wisely.

### Trade Justice

In many parts of the world food producers not only have to contend with a changing climate but also with a trading system which favours the strong. The campaign for trade justice is about rectifying the balance. Fair trade systems are about providing opportunities for producers to receive a good return for the produce.

There are many ways we can engage with these campaigns: buying fair-trade goods, lobbying with others for changes in international trade, finding out about trade practices, choosing where we buy and informing others of what is going on.

We are bombarded by powerful propaganda. Simplicity involves being able to criticise this. If advertisers suggest we need something we can ask why they are telling us this and whether it is actually the case. If a supermarket is beating down prices at whose cost is it doing this? Probably not theirs.

As they have in many parts of the world, churches here can play a key part in the process of conscientisation: enabling people to be aware of what is being done to them so that they can be free to do things differently.

### Land and Biodiversity

Extensive monocultures, which are encouraged by demands for cheap food and for bio-fuels, are bad for biodiversity. But the biodiversity of land can be increased by organic cultivation and other measures. The Environmental Stewardship scheme, launched by Defra in 2005, gives financial inducements to farmers to work in ways that encourage wildlife. There is Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship.

The diocese can encourage increased biodiversity on glebe land. Church land could also be used for woodland or energy generation. Churchyards and gardens can be maintained for the benefit of wildlife. Many schools already have an environmental study area and wildlife garden.

### **Water**

Grey water systems involve re-using water. Rainwater collection, treatment and use is also possible. Plumbing alterations and installations are needed. This is not a high priority for vicarages and not necessary in churches. Water consumption can be cut down by simply reducing cistern size (with a brick) and repairing dripping taps.

### **Buying recycled materials**

Recycled paper and card are readily available. Because of the fluctuations in the market there are occasional news reports of paper being transported large distances for processing, thereby reducing or removing any environmental benefit. This kind of cost needs to be offset against the fact that paper made from new wood also has to be transported. On the whole recycled materials are more environmentally friendly. But those responsible for purchasing materials for the diocesan office and parish offices need to be kept informed of what are the best materials to use.

### **Re-using and Recycling**

Many used materials can be re-used. Many of those that cannot be re-used can be recycled. The alternative is incineration or burial in a landfill site. Local authorities have targets for recycling and churches should recycle what they can. Authorities are limited in the range of materials they can collect but more can be deposited at recycling centres. It is good for local churches and offices to

- re-use as much as possible
- purchase long life and repairable products
- recycle what cannot be re-used
- encourage people to recycle
- act as deposit points for small items which the local authority will not collect, with one person taking a load to the recycling centre when it is ready
- reduce travel by having members carry to the recycling centre materials from a number of people

### **Phone and e-mail**

A considerable amount of paper can be saved by using the phone and e-mails. Printing off e-mails is often superfluous and it is possible to develop ways of working which almost eliminate this.

### **Bulk Buying**

Schemes such as the Churches Purchasing Scheme give the benefit of lower prices through bulk buying. There are schemes which specialise in environmentally friendly products and such schemes can often be of

benefit to the producer and the buyer. The diocese could disseminate information on these. It could also arrange bulk purchases of some items such as low energy lightbulbs and PV cells and thus encourage local churches to reduce their environmental impact.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommend that:

- all churches should celebrate festivals of the agricultural year in was appropriate for their context.
- churches should help people appreciate the diversity of sources of our food and the particular benefits of locally produced, environmentally responsible, animal friendly and fairly traded products.
- churches should develop ways of helping parishioners find out about and discuss issues of land use, food production and food distribution practices, and to act in ways that are just and environmentally responsible.
- Churches should help people realise that activities which help them engage creatively with nature are a part of their spiritual life and not something apart from it; and should provide the means and opportunity for people to encourage each other in developing this participation in creation.
- Housing and Glebe Committee should work towards ensuring that glebe land is either (a) cultivated in an environmentally friendly way (b) used for local food production e.g. as allotments, (c) used for wood production, (d) used for energy generation, or (e) used in some other way that is good overall for the environment.
- in both local churches and the diocesan administration attention should be paid the ensure that materials are not being used unnecessarily.
- wherever possible materials should be recycled and churches should put in place ways of enabling their members and local communities to recycle more
- phone and e-mail should be used wherever possible
- a diocesan officer should be given the time and resources to provide regular up to date information and advice to churches and officers on food, trade justice, recycling, purchasing, land use and other activities which impact on our environment.
- a diocesan officer should arrange the bulk buying of items which will help local churches reduce their environmental impact.



I DON'T MEAN LOW AS  
IN LOW & HIGH CHURCH  
SIR, BUT LOW CARBON  
AND HIGH ENERGY