

To  
Teach  
Is to  
Touch  
A life  
Forever

**NEWSLETTER**



**KILDARE & LEIGHLIN  
POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS**



**SEPTEMBER 2010**

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## The Importance of Ecology and the Care of the Earth

I enclose some information on the care of the earth and suggest you take this as a focus for the semester or the year. There are many problems confronting us from Church, State, economy, drugs etc., but all are relative if we destroy the very planet on which we live by greed, lack of awareness, carelessness etc. This blue green gem seen from outer space is our home. The God we worship is the source of life who has guided the universe for 13.7 billion years with the earth, galaxies and stars in perfect balance. We as humans are capable of destroying the balance if we are not careful.

The earth can be our teacher:

Subjectivity—	the uniqueness of everything and person, no two snowflakes or flowers are the same
Diversity—	there is no end to the many species
Interconnectedness—	you cannot pluck a flower without disturbing a star. We are all one.

If we had a realization of these three aspects, how different life would be for all! I enclose the 'Earth Charter'. We have the ten Commandments, the universal human rights charter and now the earth charter. This broadens out our moral horizon. We condemn genocide, biocide, suicide and now we must add geocide— the very killing of the earth, our home, the planet on which we live and which sustains us. In my book 'A Liberating Spirituality for Religious Educators' I say that no spirituality today is valid unless it takes account of the world's poor (liberation theology), half the population, women (feminine theology) and the earth itself (ecology and cosmology). I also critique education which ought to be a search for truth and not so competitive. We want to create community, but we pit people against each other in school, at times only serving the market economy instead of forming whole people. There are nine different types of intelligence. Do we only care for one—the academic?

Earth Charter: please find enclosed some reflections on eco-spirituality and some bibliography. I recommend Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry and we heard Nellie McLaughlin at one of our Seminars in Kilkenny. Her book is 'Out of Wonder' available at Veritas and one chapter in my book 'Liberating Spirituality for Religious Educators' by Anne M. Holton available in Veritas. The 'Cry of the Earth' by our bishops is also excellent.

This whole cosmological area is in our Leaving Cert. course 'Science and Religion' and has a separate book for pupils and teachers. It broadens our image of God and helps us all to live with the broader horizon in mind. **Life** is such a gift and a miracle, treasure it.

The physical universe is telling us spiritual truths. We are all connected. The God of one is the God of all. Diversity is a blessing. The suffering of anyone on any part of planet Earth is a desecration to us all. God's grace runs through all creation and can heal us all.

People encounter God under shady oak trees, on riverbanks, at tops of mountains and in long stretches of barren wilderness. God shows up in whirlwinds, starry skies, burning bushes and perfect strangers. When people want to know more about God,

## Prayer

O Thou who created the universe and all that we see in our planet, we worship your pulsating presence in all that you have made. You are in the sun and the moon and the stars. You are in the wind and the water. You are in all that you have made and all that you have made is in you. We thank you for the myriad ways we see you, name you, and even though human consciousness cannot grasp your cosmic presence, for you are much greater than our capacity to be aware. Surely our fixation on controlling the ways we relate to you is like canonising a single grain in a Sahara of sand. Only our need to return to our sources makes any sense of our efforts. Only your infinite patience gives us the courage to reach out to you over and over again

## Revision of the Junior Cert. Syllabus - Ten Years On

I attended a Colloquium in Kilkenny representing Diocesan Advisors, called by the Dept. with Suzanne Dillon, Dept. Inspector, Anne Looney and Noirin Hynes. There was only about twenty people attending. The main idea was how to examine the affective as well as cognitive and also how to engage creatively with multi-faith. Since our syllabus is for people of all faiths and no faith, we seem so far to be managing the latter ok but there are bigger numbers coming up as is evident in Primary schools.

**Inter-faith:** there are two principles here

1. Fidelity to one's own identity
2. Openness to the other shown in friendship, celebrating their festivals

As regards inter-faith, we will address it again. We welcome all, but are clear who **we** are too as Christians and celebrate our Christian faith. I send resources on these occasions and there is plenty on the Internet.

## Leaving Cert. Exam

We are lucky to have a sound theology on the R.E. Syllabus accepted by the Department of Education. The textbooks, teachers books, guidelines from NCCA, Bishops are all there, but the uptake is slow, about 200 schools. The schools in the Diocese who are doing it are happy with the Exam., also parents etc. it deserves a re-think from all sides.

**Faith Development** is its main aim, although exam marks knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills. We cannot examine Faith, but our task is to bring faith to life and life to faith. We must try in our process to teach head, heart and hand cognitive, objective and behavioural and form a concept at the **end** of the shared praxis process and having touched their whole person they will remember it and make sense for life.

the son of God tells them to pay attention to the tiling of the field and the birds of the air, to women kneading bread and workers lining up for their pay and people on the dole.

The house of God stretches from one corner of the universe to the other. Sea monsters and ostriches live in it, along with people who pray in languages I do not speak and whose names I do not know. I am a guest here charged with serving other guests—even those who present themselves as my enemies. I am allowed to resist them but as long as I trust in the one God who made us all, I cannot act as if they are no kin to me. There is only one Home. Human beings will either learn to live in it together or we will not survive to hear sighs of relief when our numbered days are done.

Do we build God a house so that we can choose when to see God? Do we build God a house in lieu of having God stay at ours? What happens to the rest of the world when we build four walls, cap them with a steepled roof and designate **that** the House of God? What happens to the riverbank, the mountaintops, the deserts, the trees? What happens to the people who never show up in our houses of God? St. Francis could not have told you the difference between 'the sacred' and 'the secular'. He read the world as reverently as he read the Bible. He built a church, but Francis' church did not stand as a shelter from the world. It stood as a reminder that the whole world is God's house.

People travel halfway around the world to visit a monastery i.e. India. The last place most people look is right under their feet in the everyday activities, accidents and encounters of their lives. What possible spiritual significance could a trip to the grocery store have?

*'When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe'* (John Muir)

All creatures and all communities are included and reconciled in the Incarnation. We and our fellow creatures are included in the mystery that is God in Jesus Christ. Jesus risen remains among us. Three principles can guide us 1) fertile soil and water are a gift from God and ultimately belong to God 2) living and waking in community, in service of God 3) misuse of soil or water and disrupting climate on which all earth's creatures depend are offences against Christ. All three principles are exemplified in the prophetic alternative life of Jesus (Mt. 5:1-12, Lk. 6:20,23)

Harmony with the earth, in an economy of quality with a commitment to Jesus whom we await in hope, is the only genuine progress. David Brower, founder of Friends of the Earth says:

*'We may see that progress is the  
Accelerating speed with which we multiply  
And subdue the earth, now the growing numbers  
Of things we process and cling to.  
It is a way along which to search for truth  
To find serenity and love and reverence for life  
To be part of an enduring harmony'*

## Seminar in Kilkenny for four Dioceses

This year we have Rev. Michael Drumm who will inspire us as always, so necessary in our present crisis in the Church which he will address in his own unique and fluent way.

### R.T.A.I.

I **encourage** you to join. It will be the only source of information now that Department in-services is not available. It is a **vital** resource. Lorraine Gillespie who will speak at the Kilkenny Seminar will inform you of all the many changes. It is presumed you will form clusters and help each other as is done in other subjects. **Come** and hear her.

### Visitation

I will visit your school to give you a chance to meet with colleagues and discuss our future and share information which I presume you do in faculty ever day at coffee break. I prefer to come to you on request, but I always phone to make sure it suits. I do expect **some time** after travelling specially to visit. My role is to support and encourage as you undertake this great vocation of passing on the faith in an unfriendly environment at times.

### Resources

I send you resources at the beginning of the year, Advent and Christmas, Lent and Graduation. **Please share them.** I can and will put them on the website if that is what you prefer. **Let me know.** So far people prefer a hardcopy. **Please copy them for each other and share.**

## Retreats

If you cannot afford to take the class **away** why not devise a 'Prayer Walk' in their own surroundings? It will be raising their awareness that God is in everything and in themselves. They don't have to go away to enable us to see God in the ordinary things of life. You can find quotes from Scripture to enlighten the trip and also poetry, a tree, a flower, a person who passes by, an animal, a bird, a leaf etc. Only when they find God in the ordinary can they appreciate the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith.

### Faith Connect

We are teaching the Internet generation who live in Cyberspace! *'The Search for Meaning'*, the first section of the Leaving Cert. syllabus is done for us by Mater /Dei and Veritas in this manner. We demonstrated it last year at the Seminar.

### Philosophy

Some talk about Philosophy for Post-Primary. I assure you there is enough in our section *'Search for Meaning'* and all I believe they can take at this stage. When this question of theology arises in debate be sure to remember this. It seems not to be generally known in public debate due to the fact that we have not spoken out.

### Recommended Book

*'Begin with the Heart'* by Daniel O'Leary available in Veritas, Abbey Street, and Cathedral Books, Sackville Place, is the best book you can get on catechesis today. You heard him speak at our Seminar last year and I enclose a page from him from the *'Tablet'*.