

EducationSunday

8 February 2009

'THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S.' HOW THEN SHALL WE TEACH?

What is education for? Is it simply about wealth creation, or is it also about well-being? Does it train pupils only to compete effectively as individuals, or can education prepare us to live in more sustainable relationships with our fellow human beings, and with the ecosystems on which we depend so completely?

The Bible proclaims that our environment – the earth and all that is in it – is not simply there for us to explore and exploit, but that it belongs to God. We as human beings are part of creation, 'made from the dust of the earth', and intimately related to our fellow creatures. Yet we are also called apart within creation to reflect God's image in looking after it on his behalf. This should affect how we educate young people in profound ways. Perhaps we can reflect on how education can prepare pupils for responsible stewardship of God's world, or how education can recover a vision of connecting people with a sense of place and belonging – experiencing the joy of planting, growing and eating food, and reflecting on our dependence. Rather than encouraging us to see the world as our oyster – something to admire, consume or exploit and then discard – perhaps education needs to see the world as a gift on trust, a family heirloom to treasure, enjoy and pass on intact.

In Psalm 147 we read of God's intimate relationship with creation – he knows the stars by name – and of his provision in rain, grass and wheat. In

our search for sustainability he is the Sustainer, not only of people, but of all creatures, of the weather systems and of Earth itself. In an age when the fear of climate change and other environmental disasters looms large in pupils' minds, God's commitment to creation gives us hope. Through Christ – the Creator, Sustainer and Saviour of all things – there is hope, both that people can be transformed from selfish consumers into loving caretakers of creation, and also that creation itself can be set free from its bondage to decay.

Rev Dave Bookless, A Rocha UK

Teaching ideas

Education Sunday is a national day of prayer and celebration for everyone involved in the world of education. For more than 100 years there has been an annual recognition of Education Sunday in England and Wales, traditionally on the ninth Sunday before Easter.

The ideas in this article are designed to help you prepare for your own celebration on or around Education Sunday. If you feel unable to devote a whole service to celebrating the theme, you may want to use some of the ideas on other occasions, such as at the start or end of the academic year, either in your church, or in local schools, colleges and universities.

Next year Education Sunday will be on 31 January 2010.

Suggested hymns and songs

- All creatures of our God and King
- Fearfully and wonderfully made
- For the beauty of the earth
- I, the Lord of sea and sky
- Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it
- My Jesus, my Saviour
- O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
- O worship the King
- Praise, my soul, the King of heaven
- Wonderful Maker (You spread out the skies)

Songs for children

- God's wonderful world
- He's got the whole world in his hands
- Who's the King of the jungle?
- You shall go out with joy

More suggestions available at www.educationsunday.org

Prayer

Lord God, Father of Creation,
You made all that exists from nothing:
Spoke into existence each bird and tree,
Designed the detail of each butterfly and flower,
Made us from dust, one part of your world.

Lord God, Saviour of the world,
You made your covenant with all living creatures:
Watch when a sparrow falls to the ground,
Sustain all creation by your word,
Send your Son to bring healing to creation.

Lord God, Spirit of life,
You breathe your image into human beings;
Inspire us with love for your world,
Charge us to care for all you have made,
Invite us to steward and care for your world.

Blessed God, Father, Son, Spirit,
We praise you for all you have created.
Forgive us for taking your works for granted.
Equip us with vision and ability to fulfil our task:
To act justly, live simply and walk humbly with you, our God,
In the garden of your Creation.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Ideas for shared worship

- Visit www.arocha.org for a range of ideas and resources for worship and teaching.
- Set up some interactive prayer stations on the theme of education and the environment. Visit the Education Sunday website for ideas and resources for setting up your prayer stations.
- Ask some pupils/students in your church or community to write some prayers which fit into this year's theme.
- The book *Living in a Fragile World* by Peter Privett (£7.99 from www.brf.org.uk) includes a series of sessions based on Godly Play (a unique method of storytelling) which invite both children and adults to reflect on the fragility of the earth, and consider how we might relate to each other in a more sustainable and relational way.

Lectionary readings

- Isaiah 40:21-31
- 1 Corinthians 9:16-23
- Psalm 147:1-11, 20c
- Mark 1:29-39

Further resources

Further resources including prayers, sermon outlines, ideas for children's talks/assemblies, further reading and helpful websites, are available from the Education Sunday website. The following churches and organisations also produce supplementary material:

Association of Christian Teachers

94a London Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 1NX
www.christians-in-education.org.uk

Baptist Union of Great Britain

129 Broadway, Didcot, Oxon OX11 8RT
www.baptist.org.uk

The Catholic Church Catholic Education Service

39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX
www.cesew.org.uk

The Church of England and The National Society

Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3AZ
www.natsoc.org.uk

Churches Together in England

27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH
www.churches-together.net

The Methodist Church Education Office

25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR
www.methodist.org.uk

The Salvation Army Schools and Colleges Unit

UK & Ireland Office, 101 Newington Causeway,
London SE1 6BN
www.salvationarmy.org.uk/schools

Student Christian Movement

Unit 308F, The Big Peg, 120 Vyse Street, The Jewellery
Quarter, Birmingham B18 6NF
www.movement.org.uk

The United Reformed Church

Church House, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT
www.urc.org.uk

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The Education Sunday 2009 theme was devised by an ecumenical steering group representing the following Christian denominations and organisations:

- Association of Christian Teachers
- Baptist Union
- The Catholic Church
- The Church of England and the National Society
- The Methodist Church
- The Salvation Army

• Student Christian Movement

• United Reformed Church.

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