



A GREENER CALLING

In an unprecedented show of unity, a global contingent of faith leaders are joining forces to preach the gospel of green.

By Meredith Bryan Photographs by Ben Baker

WINDSOR CASTLE, THE BUCOLIC weekend retreat of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and her pack of corgis, has witnessed the plague, beheadings, and centuries of state dinners, but it's surely never seen this: a procession of bearded Sikhs in orange turbans, bald Buddhist monks in habits, Jews in top hats and prayer shawls, Japanese Shintos in white *jôes*—even a Greek Orthodox archbishop in a black *kamilafki* hat and floor-length cassock. On an unseasonably warm day last November, a group of British schoolchildren led this diverse troop from the small town of Windsor through the castle's Hogwarts-worthy gate for a vegan feast of stuffed mushrooms and parsnips. It was all part of "Many Heavens, One Earth," an event organized by the United Nations and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), designed to promote environmental evangelism among people of faith—the largest international gathering of its kind.

To some, the term *religious environmentalist* might sound curiously newfangled. Yet most global faiths preach that the planet

was divinely created, even if few have been at the vanguard of the movement to protect it from unholy exploitation. Given the politically charged UN climate talks in December, gatherings like this one are likely to become even more important—possibly the basis for a new grassroots environmental movement.

Among the initiatives announced at the event: Chinese Taoists pledged to reduce their use of incense, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana hopes to plant 200,000 seedlings, Muslims aim to print the Qur'an on sustainable materials, and the Jewish Climate Change Campaign wants to halve collective meat consumption in five years. By the time a Baptist choir from Baltimore took the stage for a rousing rendition of "All Creatures of Our God and King," prompting the multilingual congregation to leap to its feet and cry out for an encore, all things seemed possible.

As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reminded the crowd of 200, faith leaders have the ear—and the hearts—of billions (85 percent of the Earth's population identifies with a religion). "You can, and do, inspire people to change," he said. Read on to learn about some of the pioneering attendees who are galvanizing believers back home—and beyond.

"If you love your neighbor, you don't pollute their air," says Bingham.

THE CLIMATE CLERIC

Rev. Canon Sally Bingham

An Episcopal priest preaches energy conservation to people of all faiths.

Bingham is founder and president of the Regeneration Project, whose mission is to deepen the connection between ecology and religion.

Her eco aha! moment:

More than 20 years ago, the then 45-year-old stay-at-home mom found herself wondering why the Episcopal clergy didn't preach environmental stewardship. "It seemed like there was a lot of hypocrisy," recalls Bingham. "In the Book of Common Prayer, we pray for reverence for the Earth, but then I would see people throwing trash out the windows of their cars. If the people in the pews who profess a love for God's creation are not protecting it, how can we expect anyone else to?" A reverend at Bingham's church in San Francisco suggested she enroll in seminary to explore these questions; after first completing her undergraduate degree at the University of San Francisco, she did just that. She was ordained as a priest in 1997.

Her work: So far, 10,000 congregations in 30 states have joined the Regeneration Project's Interfaith Power and Light campaign, which Bingham launched in 1998 to help fight global warming. Member churches pledge to reduce their energy consumption by installing energy-efficient lightbulbs and appliances and utilizing technologies like solar power. More important, they commit to educating their flocks. "The congregations serve as examples to the members of their communities," says Bingham.

What's next: Last year Bingham kicked off a new program, Carbon Covenant, which helps members of Interfaith Power and Light support the environmental initiatives of religious communities in the developing world. For example, a group of nuns in Minnesota recently raised \$10,000 to help an Evangelical Lutheran church in Tanzania reforest several acres on Mount Kilimanjaro.