

## Aim

From the start, the 'Loaves & Fishes' project was about more than 'just' the environment. It was an initiative about Community and Creation, encouraging people all around Morecambe Bay to reach out with their neighbours in a celebration of place and to include in this embrace those creatures of the seas which feed and delight us. Focused in Pentecost week, 7-15 June, it was a way of celebrating the power of God's Spirit which animates the whole of Creation, our own life and that of the creatures which share this world with us. And the project was to be an ecumenical initiative, both in its organisation and realisation.

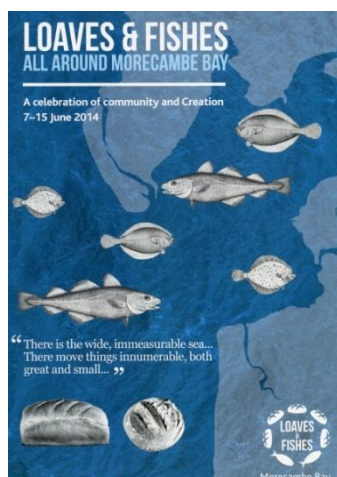


Taking a cue from the CAFOD Emmaus Meal, we aimed to encourage every coastal community between Barrow-in-Furness and Fleetwood to host some kind of 'Loaves & Fishes' meal, open to people of all faiths and none, sharing fish, seafood and bread in shore-side picnics, school meals or parish hall parties.

## Project resources and costs

Project costs, apart from the time of the team members, were envisaged as including leaflet design and printing, mailing stationery and postage and sundries associated with project week itself. The Lancaster Roman Catholic diocese Faith & Justice Commission and Blackburn diocese Social Responsibility generously agreed to provide £250 each to cover these costs.

## Network building



With the assistance of the Blackburn Cathedral Education Officer, Joanna Booth, the project team established a database of 96 faith communities and 76 schools bordering the Bay (including, for Lancashire, non-church schools), the three cathedrals and local faith community leaders. We also included 17 fishmongers and 8 artisan bakeries working around the Bay, the Real Bread Campaign, the Marine Stewardship Council, the Marine Conservation Society and the Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority as well as local environmental NGOs and community arts projects. Ronnie Semley and Dave Roberts, the Communications Officers for Blackburn and Carlisle diocese, were kept fully apprised of

the project's progress, our own environmental links added to their mailing lists and some timelines established for media releases. An early email shot in February 2014 and a surface mailing of the project leaflet in late March (front designed by Fat Media of Lancaster, the reverse by the project team, and printed by printing.com) provided the initial dissemination. Project pages also were initiated on the Blackburn diocese website at this time and a url and QR code secured.

## A little leaven ...

We trailed the project with a baking chain, initiated in Lent with the blessing of yeast and sour-dough leaven by the deans, the Very Revds Mark Boyling and Christopher Armstrong in Sunday eucharists in Carlisle and Blackburn cathedrals. Taken home, this was used to bake loaves, these shared and the leaven passed on to neighbouring faith communities. Recipes on our project web-pages and links to the Real Bread Campaign gave guidance for beginners but this was not just about baking. It was about making real the scriptures we used in the cathedral blessings:



*The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast which a woman took and mixed with half a hundred-weight of flour till all of it was risen (Matthew 13,33) and Remember! A little leaven leavens all the dough (Galatians 5,9).* And, indeed, local initiatives made the project grow around the Bay, watching bread rise, sharing loaves and meeting neighbours. Men and children baked too. Sunday Breakfast on Radio Lancashire 23 March and the *Church Times* 'Around the Dioceses' 28 March featured the Baking Chain.

## 'Loaves & Fishes' week

From the start, our emails and leaflet mailshots received an enthusiastic response to the project, with groups and individuals devising their own particular plans for joining 'Loaves & Fishes': altogether 12 faith communities and 16 schools with a good spread around the Bay. Ideas for the project week included a 3-priest bake-off on Fleetwood promenade, a Pentecost-Praise picnic with fish-shaped biscuits in Happy Mount Park in Morecambe, an open-air mackerel barbecue on Milnthorpe village green, a community beach picnic at Silverdale, an ecumenical meal in Bolton-le-Sands. In schools, loaves were baked and shared with parents, a fish-finger party arranged for local older people, and projects built around the curriculum resources we provided on our web-pages. Maintaining our Cathedral link, David Riley, the Chef-manager in Blackburn's Crypt Café devised a themed 'Loaves & Fishes' menu for the project week.

### Loaves and Fishes

John Rodwell

JT

*f*  
There is the wide im-meas-u-ra-ble sea There move things  
6  
num-ber-less both great and small but what are these a-mong so  
12  
ma - ny? Loaves and fi - shes, Loaves and fi - shes,  
17  
We can share both great and small

To help with setting celebrations in a frame of thankfulness for God's bounty, we provided suggestions for scriptural readings, psalms, hymns and prayers on our webpages, together with a refrain specially composed for the project by Jeremy Truslove, Choirmaster at Lancaster Priory. This used the words 'There is the wide immeasurable sea/There move things numberless, both great and small' (Psalm 104, 27) and, from the Feeding of the Five Thousand, 'But what are these among so many' (John 6, 9), stressing the prodigal diversity of nature and the

insatiable appetite of humankind. The refrain was also emailed as a downloadable mp3 file, together with score settings, to all faith communities and schools. In helping

participants think about the sourcing and sustainability of fish and seafood, we also provided links on our leaflet and web-pages to the Marine Stewardship Council and Marine Conservation Society.

## The Blessing on the Beach

The central event of the 'Loaves & Fishes' week was a Blessing on the Beach arranged for Monday 9 June on Arnside Promenade. For this we produced a simple flyer widely posted around the area, making a special effort to recruit local communities, schools and businesses, and an order of service with readings, psalm, prayers and the project refrain. On the day itself, the gift of God's rain on cue at noon drove us indoors but the hospitality of St James' Church gave space and focus for a gathering of 200 people from far and wide around the Bay, including children from 7 schools, with a contingent of visiting pupils and teachers from India.

The Rt Revd Michael Campbell OSA, RC Bishop of Lancaster, the Rt Revd Robert Freeman, Anglican Bishop of Penrith, the Rt Revd Julian Henderson, Anglican Bishop of Blackburn, the Revd Sarah Moore, President Cumbria are NW URC Synod, the Revd Richard Teal, Chair Cumbria District of Methodist Church, the Revd David Tidswell, Superintendent, North Lancashire Methodist



Circuit and a representative of the Society of Friends, led our silent appreciation of the presence of God against the wondrous backdrop of Morecambe Bay, prayed together for the well-being of its seascape and wild creatures, for all whose life and livelihood is found around the coast and for those who would not know community or eat well that day.



A French horn, trombone, flutes, recorder and a violin introduced the project refrain, the children of Storth Church of England Primary School playing and singing for us. Then the children carried up newly-caught fish from the Bay – the first sea trout of the year, a red gurnard, plaice, flounders, mackerel – and freshly-baked loaves for a blessing. Picnics held aloft, the whole congregation felt blessed by the presence of the God in whose love all created things are

held, feasting and chatting together afterwards. A frequent remark was 'When will this happen again?' Publicity for the Blessing on the Beach included items on Radio Lancashire (8 & 15 June), Radio Cumbria (8 June) and in the Westmoreland Gazette (13 June).

Meanwhile, celebrations continued elsewhere. From Grange-over-Sands, a couple emailed:

Just to let you know, we had our Loaves and Fishes barbeque on Sunday afternoon, and it was a huge success! We decided on a fish barbeque, sourced with local produce, and people brought home-made bread, salads and puddings. There were two dozen of us, made up of friends, neighbours and

new friends from two of the churches in Grange. We did have leftovers, but thankfully not twelve basketsful! A Spanish couple made a fantastic seafood paella, which looked so good I had to take a picture. Thanks to whoever had the idea for Loaves and Fishes around Morecambe Bay.

This was exactly what we had hoped for: Christian people celebrating together, to widen their community of friends and their appreciation of their fellow creatures, all held together in their dependence on the love of God.

## **The project legacy**

With the benefit of longer reflection, we can return to the question of the project legacy but, for the moment, we recognise the following:

- an experience of ecumenical collaboration across two counties and, in particular, of partnership between the environmental interests of the Anglican & RC dioceses.
- establishment of a project partnership that involved cathedrals, diocesan education services, faith communities and primary and secondary schools
- a network of 12 faith communities and 16 schools actually participating in the project, showing commitment and initiative in rediscovering Community & Creation
- accumulating feedback and images of the celebrations and projects which can be posted on the project webpages and disseminated more widely in the faith communities
- webpages with worship materials and curriculum links that could form the basis of a richer source of liturgical and educational material for environmental projects
- a wider database of 96 faith communities, 76 schools, businesses, environmental NGOs and interested individuals around Morecambe Bay
- wider awareness across the region of the churches' concern for community and creation
- an awareness in the project team of how valuable social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, would be for the environmental initiatives of our faith communities
- project costs falling within the funds provided

We were not so successful at

- encouraging schools 'Loaves & Fishes' project work to be displayed in Blackburn and Lancaster cathedrals, opportunities kindly arranged by the Canon Chancellor of the former and the Deans
- working ourselves with local businesses to raise awareness of sourcing and sustainability
- eliciting a response from local environmental NGOs, community arts projects and local food-banks, not for want of trying
- and we could have thought of including parish councils in our mailings.

**'Loaves & Fishes' was an initiative of the Environment Groups of the Blackburn Anglican Diocese (John Rodwell & Chris Halliwell) and Churches Together in Cumbria (Michael & Margaret Watson) , the Lancaster Roman Catholic Diocese Faith & Justice Commission & CAFOD Lancaster (Maggie McSherry) and Churches Together in Lancashire (Helen Boothroyd) .**