

Resources for Environmental Liturgy

Found in *The Book of Common Prayer, Enriching Our Worship, and The Hymnal 1982*

The Episcopal Church has many more resources for environmental liturgy than we might think, which is why they're often overlooked. These easy-to-use notes are meant to provide assistance for anyone leading and/or planning a service of environmental liturgy based on the BCP, EOW (*Enriching Our Worship* -- supplemental materials prepared by the Standing Liturgical Commission), and *The Hymnal 1982*.

Basic Principles

- (1) *Community*: The "common prayer" on which our Prayer Book is based and the lived reality of "community" (which Dietrich Bonhoeffer called our "life together") are excellent starting points for any kind of prayerful reflection on the environment.
- (2) *The Interconnectedness of Life*: Sacramental liturgy invites us to live in the presence of God and to experience our lives as part of God's creation. Esther de Waal once described sacramental worship as "*Christ-centered and Creation-filled*."
- (3) *The Goodness of Creation*: God's creation has purpose, value, and meaning in and of itself. The natural order cannot be measured solely by its usefulness to us. Rather, "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof" (Psalm 24:1).
- (4) *Stewardship*: Our responsibility is to care for every part of God's creation, by finding ways to make our presence an instrument of God's justice, peace and renewal in the Spirit.
- (5) *Holy Love*: The Two Great Commandments are the foundation of Christian social and environmental teachings. Our call and challenge is to extend the love of God and of our neighbors to all earth's creatures and to future generations.
- (6) *Justice*: The poor and powerless suffer the most as a result of environmental exploitation, just as the roots of the environmental crisis are largely found in economic exploitation. Environmental justice is so tied to economic justice that, in practice, it amounts to the same ministry.
- (7) *Diversity*: The biologist E.O. Wilson reminds us that biological diversity is intrinsic to life itself. This means that biological diversity and cultural diversity are inextricably linked. "Diversity" is not a problem to be solved, but a part of life that calls out respect and praise.

Environmental Themes for the Liturgical Seasons

Advent: As we prepare for Christ's coming among us, the lectionary texts hold up a vision of God's shalom that involves the whole creation. We yearn for, are called to get ready for, and live towards the day when the earth will be filled with the glory of God: when the wolf shall lie down with the lamb, and when the wilderness and dry land shall blossom. The time of deepening darkness that coincides with Advent also fosters reflection on dormancy, winter and stillness as necessary parts of the natural cycle and of our spiritual lives. And, the challenge to focus on preparing for Christ's birth at this time of year when our culture celebrates consumption above all connects profoundly with the call to live simply, sustainably and mindfully of the poor.

Christmas. The mystery of the incarnation invites reflection on the preciousness, vulnerability and kinship of all flesh -- skin, fur, feather and fin -- and the profound presence of God in the material world. Further, the angels sing of glory in heaven and peace on earth welcoming Christ's birth, and there is the old tradition that on Christmas Eve the animals can speak. From the profoundly theological to folk intuition, at Christmas we sense that the incarnation is good news for the whole creation, and heaven and nature sing.

Epiphany: Seasonal themes include the gifts of the stranger, the spreading light of Christ, and the call to follow Jesus. Cross-cultural epiphanies, God revealed in the natural world, and environmental discipleship are all possible applications here, including the close relationship between justice for the world's poorest and care for the earth.

Lent: The Litany of Penitence for Ash Wednesday names a number of the ways we sin against creation and future generations, and evokes our interconnectedness even as it confesses our brokenness. More positively, the traditional disciplines of Lent -- prayer, fasting and alms giving -- suggest ways of healing our relationship to creation as well as to God, our human neighbors, and ourselves.

Easter: At the core of our faith is the proclamation that love is stronger than death. As we face devastating changes to our lives and our planet caused by global warming, as we think about what kind of communities our churches can be in these times, may we find in the gospel message the courage and hope to truly envision a new and sustainable way of living together in that transformative love. Earth Day usually falls in the Easter season, giving us an opportunity to focus on creation care, and the renewal of the earth's beauty in springtime has long evoked the resurrection of Jesus and the enduring faithfulness of God.

Rogation Days: Late in Eastertide we celebrate the traditional Rogation Days. For some churches, this is a natural occasion to bless gardens, plant flowers and give thanks for the beauty of the earth in springtime. And our prayers for a good harvest take on new meaning in a time threatened by famine and global food shortage due in part to climate change.

Pentecost: "Praise the Spirit in creation" says a hymn, evoking God's divine breath which animates and connects all living beings. The psalm for Pentecost, Psalm 104, wonderfully celebrates God's wisdom and Spirit in all the creatures of the earth. The coming of the Spirit breaks old barriers, leads us into all truth, and creates unity in diversity- all potent ecological themes.

Trinity Sunday: The creation story in Genesis 1 is appointed for Trinity Sunday in year A, and in year C the first reading focuses on God's wisdom in creation. Both suggest intriguing connections between the mystery of the triune God --whose very nature is relationship -- and the created world.

The Sundays after Pentecost: The "long green season" has us read many of Jesus' parables about the natural world, and allows us to reflect on our own vocation as disciples and as Christian community. Our relationship to the natural world is included in the call to love God and neighbor. Sometimes nature is our text and teacher, just as it apparently was for Jesus. This season generally includes a time when our congregations focus on stewardship- a theme that inescapably includes our care for this fragile earth, the creatures with whom we share it, and those who will come after us.

Morning and Evening Prayer

An Opening Sentence in Advent: "Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness, let the earth open, that salvation may spring up, and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also." (EOW, p. 18)

Antiphon on other Sundays and weekdays: "The earth is the Lord's for he made it: Come let us adore him." (BCP, p. 81)

Antiphon on Psalm 134: "Yours is the day, O God, yours also the night; you established the moon and the sun." (EOW, p. 24)

Morning Psalm 63:1-8: "O God, you are my God, eagerly I seek you; my souls thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a barren and dry land where there is no water ..." (EOW, p. 22)

The Venite: "In his hands are the caverns of the earth, and the heights of the hills are his also ..." (BCP, p. 82); "In your hands are the caverns of the earth, and the heights of the hills are yours also ..." (EOW, p. 21)

Canticle 12, *A Song of Creation: The Cosmic Order, The Earth and its Creatures, The People of God.* (BCP, pp. 88-90; EOW, pp. 25-27)

Canticle D, *A Song in the Wilderness:* "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom." (EOW, p. 32)

Canticle H, *A Song of Hosea:* "Let us humble ourselves, let us strive to know the Lord, whose justice dawns like morning light, its dawning as sure as the sunrise." (EOW, p. 34)

Canticle J, *A Song of Judith:* "Let the whole creation serve you, for you spoke and all things came into being." (EOW, p. 35)

Canticle O, *A Song of the Heavenly City:* "I saw the clean river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The tree of life spanned the river, giving fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (EOW, p. 38)

Canticle S, *A Song of Our True Nature:* "We are all bound to God by nature, and we are all bound to God by grace." (EOW, p. 41)

The Holy Eucharist

Eucharistic Prayer C: "At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home ... but we turned against you, and betrayed your trust; and we turned against one another." (BCP, pp. 369-374)

Eucharistic Prayer 1: "You have filled us and all creation with your blessing and fed us with your constant love ... you gave the world into our care that we might be your faithful stewards and show forth your bountiful grace." (EOW, p. 57)

Eucharistic Prayer 2: "... From before time you made ready the creation, Your Spirit moved over the deep and brought all things into being: sun, moon, and stars; earth, winds, and waters; and every living thing. ..." (EOW, p. 60)

Eucharistic Prayer 3: "You laid the foundations of the world and enclosed the sea when it burst out from the womb; You brought forth all creatures of the earth and gave breath to humankind." (EOW, p. 63.

Collect of the Day (for occasional use): "God of unchangeable power, when you fashioned the world the morning stars sang together and the host of heaven shouted for joy: open our eyes to the wonders of creation and teach us to use all things for good, to the honor of your glorious name; through Jesus Christ our Lord." (EOW, p. 52, From A New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 569)

A Blessing: "Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you as a mother. Go in peace to follow the good road and may God's blessing be with you always. Amen." (EOW, p. 71, from Saint Clare)

Prayers (pages refer to the BCP)

For Joy in God's Creation	p. 814	For the Oppressed	p. 826
For the Human Family	p. 815	For the Right Use of God's Gifts	p. 827
For Peace Among Nations	p. 816	For Those Who Influence Public Opinion	p. 827
For Courts of Justice	p. 821	For Knowledge of God's Creation	p. 827
For Social Justice	p. 823	For the Conservation of Natural Resources	p. 827
For Agriculture	p. 824	For the Harvest of Lands and Waters	p. 828
For the Unemployed	p. 824	For Rain	p. 828
For the Good Use of Leisure	p. 825	For the Future of the Human Race	p. 828
For Cities	p. 825	For Guidance	p. 832
For Towns and Rural Areas	p. 825	A Prayer of Self-Dedication	p. 832
For the Poor and the Neglected	p. 826	A Prayer Attributed to St. Francis	p. 833

Thanksgivings (pages refer to the BCP)

A General Thanksgiving	p. 836
A Litany of Thanksgiving	p. 836
For the Diversity of Races and Cultures	p. 840
For the Beauty of the Earth	p. 840
For the Harvest	p. 840

Hymns (pages refer to The Hymnal)

Morning has broken	p. 8	All things bright and beautiful	p. 405
Not here for high and holy things	p. 9	Most high omnipotent good Lord	p. 406-7
The duteous day now closeth	p. 46	The spacious firmament on high	p. 409
O day of radiant gladness	p. 48	Earth and all stars	p. 412
Joy to the world	p. 100	For the beauty of the earth	p. 416
'Twas in the moon of wintertime	p. 114	For the fruit of all creation	p. 424
Over the chaos of the empty waters	p. 176, 7	O all ye works of God	p. 428
Praise to God, immortal praise	p. 288	The stars declare his glory	p. 431
We plow the fields	p. 291	How wondrous and great thy works	p. 532-3
O Jesus, crowed with all renown	p. 292	Joyful, joyful, we adore thee	p. 376
St. Patrick's Breastplate	p. 370	Let all the world in every corner sing	p. 402-3
O worship the King, all glorious above	p. 388	The stars declare his glory	p. 431
Let us with a gladsome mind	p. 389	O all ye works of god	p. 428
Creating God, your fingers trace	p. 394-5	Like the murmur of the dove's song	p. 513
I sing the almighty power of God	p. 398	Morning glory, starlit sky	p. 585
All creatures of our God and king	p. 400	O day of peace that dimly shines	p. 597