

Service for Earth Day or Creation Celebration

April 21 or 28, 2019 *(or anytime!)*

From the Wisconsin UCC Creation Care Team



Theme: “Water: Gift of Life”

or “Water gives life and spirit to all Creation”

Scriptures: Genesis 1 and 2; Numbers 20:1-11; Deuteronomy 8:6-10; Psalm 24:1-6; Psalm 46 (especially verse 4), Psalm 104:10-13; Isaiah 43:16-21; Ezekiel 34:18

Call to Worship I

(From “A Desert Faith in a Desert Time,” Ghost Ranch, 2013) —PEC Ferncliff Conference

Reprinted in “Water, Holy Water” by Creation Justice Ministries www.creationjustice.org

We gather to worship God, the Lord and Giver of Life

God, give us the waters of new life

In the deserts of our lives, in the wilderness within,

God, give us the waters of new life

To give us hope when our lives run dry, to give us strength when our world seems barren

God gives us waters of new life

To let peace flow like a river and love spring forth like a fountain,

God, give us the waters of new life

To make justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a living stream,

God, give us the waters of new life.

To give us - and our world - a second chance and a new beginning,

God, give us the waters of new life

Come, people of God, open your lives to receive God’s new life. Open your hearts to sing God’s praise.

A Creation Story Call to Worship

(Based on Genesis 1 and 2)

In the beginning, when the earth was without form, God's spirit was moving over the face of the waters.

We feel your spirit still moving in our waters, sustaining all of Creation.

Before the firmament was formed, waters covered the earth.

Water was the first gift, and is still circling and cycling throughout our planet.

On the third day, God gathered the waters together and let dry land appear.

God call the dry ground "Earth" and the waters "Seas."

Before the first rain fell, mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

This precious cycle continues forever, from vapor to clouds, to rain on fields and forests and wetlands, back to the air again.

On the fifth day, God called the waters to bring forth swarms of living creatures, and God blessed them.

As God saw that the waters and all they sustain were very good, so we see how precious they are yet today, and give thanks for the gift of water. Thanks be to God!

A Wisconsin Waters Call to Worship or Litany

(Highlighting our state waters and the many forms water takes in the water cycle)

Water sustains our lives and our spirits.

We give thanks for the gift of water.

Some say "Wisconsin" means "gathering of the waters." We are blessed with water in so many forms.

We give thanks for moisture in the air and clouds, snow and rain.

Groundwater in the soil and bedrock is a pure fountain we rely on to drink and grow food.

We give thanks for this living water we drink, and for springs that replenish our streams, lakes and rivers.

Wetlands are havens to wildlife and plants, and store and purify the flow to our rivers.

We give thanks for the beauty and sustaining work wetlands do for our watershed.

From tiny, headwaters trout streams to our largest rivers, we are blessed by so many flowing waters.

We give thanks for the Fox and the Wolf, the Wisconsin and the Mississippi, and our own special streams, the _____ (insert local stream and river names here) _____.

For Lake Superior and Lake Michigan, and fifteen thousand ponds, lakes and flowages in our state, especially _____ (insert local lake names here) _____.

We give thanks for all the water flowing in us and around us, and pledge our efforts to cherish and protect this essential gift.

Opening Prayer I

(From “Water, Holy Water” by Creation Justice Ministries www.creationjustice.org)

Creator God,

We give you thanks for your creation and everything in it. Teach us to love and care for our communities and neighbors, near and far. Please help us to remember you and your gift of water now and always. May we recognize the holiness in all the earth’s water and strive for care and protection.

In your name we pray, **Amen**

Opening Prayer II

Giver of springs and streams and seas, we thank you for the gift of water sustaining all creation:

For the rocks and rapids in the river, providing food, shelter, and air to stream life

For mayflies and stoneflies, trout and walleye, frogs and turtles

For clams and otters, cattails and wild rice

For blue-winged teal, Canada geese, trumpeter swans, osprey and eagle

For all the creatures in and near the water, for clean water to drink, and for our mighty rivers and great lakes

ALL: We give you thanks and ask your help in wise care and use of this holy gift.

Opening Hymn

(New Century Hymnal numbers below; other hymnals or sources as noted)

Water related:

597 Shall we Gather at the River - Chalice Hymnal 701

Wind upon the Waters - Chalice 247

Wade in the Water - Chalice 371

Chester A Custer’s “The Earth O Lord Belongs to Thee,” especially verse 2

<https://www.hopepublishing.com/find-hymns-hw/hw3888.aspx>

General Creation Care related:

See “Stewardship and Creation” hymns in the New Century Hymnal, numbers 556 to 569, also:

3 Many and Great, O God are your Works - Chalice 58

4 Joyful, Joyful We Adore You - Chalice 2

12 I Sing the Mighty Power of God - Chalice 64

17 All Creatures of our God and King - Chalice 22

28 For the Beauty of the Earth - Chalice 56

31 All Things Bright and Beautiful - Chalice 61

39 Cantemos al Creador (Creator God We Sing) - Chalice 60

The Sun is on the Sea and Shore – Chalice 3

This is Our Creator’s World (This is my Father’s World) - Chalice 59

God Who Touches Earth With Beauty - Chalice 514

Prayer of Confession (*unison*)

(From “Water, Holy Water” by Creation Justice Ministries www.creationjustice.org)

Gracious God,

Forgive our neglect of what you have entrusted to us as stewards. We confess that we take your gift of water for granted and acknowledge the need for repentance and action. We are reminded of your power and love with every nourishing drink and cleansing bath. Empower us to speak for those without, and work to ensure justice and peace for all. Amen

Words of Assurance

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream **Amen.**

Or, Words of Assurance based on Psalm 46:4-5

“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;

God will help it when the morning dawns.”

So our God is in our midst and will help us through the difficulties we face.

Or, a sung response:

“Water, River, Spirit, Grace” - Chalice Hymnal number 366

“Water, River, Spirit, Grace, sweep over me, sweep over me

Recarve the depths your fingers traced, in sculpting me, in sculpting me.” (Repeat)

[Picture yourself being washed clean in the first time through the song, and the earth being cleansed during the second time through.]

Children’s Time –

- Have children see if they can identify their “watershed address.” Bring a map of your local area with the streams, rivers, and lakes highlighted, and have them find where water from their homes and schools

flows. Explain that what we do on the land affects the water. We need to be careful about keeping our yards, gardens, driveways and playgrounds clean, so rain water and snow melt don't carry dirt, leaves and other pollutants to our local waters. Also, we should bond with the river or lake that sustains us – the park by the water where you play or swim, the river where you paddle or fish, the place where the eagle we see in the sky finds fish for food – we are connected to our waters even when walking on dry land. If we love them, we will care for them.

- Spray mist from a spray bottle into the air, as the start of the water cycle (or bring in a cooler of snow!). Have children work their way through the water cycle from dew on the leaves, to moisture in the air, to clouds and rain, to puddles, runoff, streams, lakes, rivers, and oceans.
- Use the Children's sermon based on the book *"We Got Here Together,"* by Kim Stafford, from Rev. Joylynn Graham (available for download on the wcucc.org Creation Care website).
- Make a list of what should be in the water (fish, water plants, stream insects, otters, beaver, ducks, people swimming, etc.) Make another list of what shouldn't be in the water [plastic bottles (worst offender!), pop cans, shotgun shells, plastic bags, bait boxes, tires, old boots, fertilizer, pesticides, yard waste, animal and pet waste, human waste, invasive plants and animals]. Then talk about how to keep the good things in the water and the bad things out.
- Share science facts about water (how much of the earth is water, how much of the human body is water, how many lakes and river miles in Wisconsin, the volume of Lake Superior, etc.). Follow this up by how important water is to God (sacred facts about water) – we use it as seal of baptism, how sun shining through the rain forms a rainbow (a symbol of God's promise), and the 500+ places in the bible where the word water is used, etc.

Sermon – (see *Sermon and Service Ideas* below)

Hymn

(*New Century Hymnal* numbers below; other hymnals or sources as noted)

- 32 God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale - Chalice 70
- 462 Creating God Your Fingers Trace - Chalice 335
- 556 God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens - Chalice 651
- 557 Pray for the Wilderness
- 569 Touch the Earth Lightly - Chalice 693
 - For Beauty of Meadows – Chalice 696
 - Creative God You Spread the Earth - 697

Call for Offering

For all the good gifts we receive, especially the joy, beauty and sustenance of water, we share back our offerings to our Creator, the source and giver of life.

Offertory Prayer

Gracious Creator, we give thanks for all our people have offered to You today: our time, talents, and our pledges to care for the earth. Show us the right paths for your service. **Amen**

Prayers

Prayer for the Blessing of the Waters

(to be used for blessing water from a local stream, river, or lake)—Adapted from the rite of the Great Blessing of the Water as celebrated in the Orthodox tradition From “Water, Holy Water.” cited above)

You are great, O Lord, and Your works are wondrous, and there are no words capable of hymning Your wonders... For of Your own will You brought all things in to being from nothing, by Your power You uphold the whole of creation, and by Your providence You order the world... The sun sings to You, the moon glorifies You, the stars meet together before Your face, the light obeys You, the deeps shudder before You, the water springs serve You... We confess Your grace, we proclaim Your mercy, we conceal not Your gracious acts: You have set free our mortal nature. All creation sings praises to You Who have revealed Yourself. For You, our God, have appeared upon earth and have dwelled among us. Therefore, be present here now by the descent of the Holy Spirit, and sanctify this water. Give it the blessing of Jordan. Make it a fountain of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a remission of sins, a protection against disease, a destruction of demons... and may it be for those who will partake of it, to the cleansing of their souls and bodies, to the healing of their passions, to the sanctification of their homes, to every expedient purpose... Amen.

Prayer adapted from the UCC Baptismal Prayer or Luther’s “Flood Prayer”

We thank you, God, for the gift of creation called forth by your saving Word. Before the world had shape and form, your Spirit moved over the waters. Out of the waters of the deep, you formed the firmament and brought forth the earth to sustain all life.

In the time of Noah, you washed the earth with the waters of the flood, and your ark of salvation bore a new beginning.

In the time of Moses, your people Israel passed through the Red Sea waters from slavery to freedom and crossed the flowing Jordan to enter the promised land.

In the fullness of time, you sent Jesus Christ, who was nurtured in the water of Mary’s womb.

Jesus was baptized by John in the water of the Jordan, became living water to a woman at the Samaritan well, washed the feet of the disciples, and sent them forth to baptize all the nations by water and the Holy Spirit.

As in the scriptures, water is still a sacred gift, needing our care and stewardship. Strengthen and guide our actions here and across the world to save this resource that is so vital to all of Creation. We ask this through

Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, who gives us living water that will become in us “a spring gushing up to eternal life.”

We ask also for these cares of our congregation, community and the world:

[offer intercessions for people and events in your member’s lives, ending with the Lord’s Prayer]

Prayer for Clean Water

Gracious Creator and Sustainer of life, we thank you for the gift of water. We ask your blessing on all the people working for clean water in our communities, our state, our nation and across the world.

Examples: State and local water quality specialists, Community Water Dept. staff, UNICEF, Engineers Without Borders, many Non-profit Organizations, Health Departments, Legislators, etc. - Include local organizations and individuals.

Guide and inform their work so that clean water is flowing for all who depend on it: all of your people and creatures, forests, prairies and cropland, wetlands, flowing waters and lakes. Help each of us to take an active role in our homes and communities to make the right choices to conserve and protect our vital waters.

We also bring to you all the joys and cares of our church and community -

[offer intercessions for people and events in your member’s lives, ending with the Lord’s Prayer]

The Lord’s Prayer

Closing Hymn

(New Century Hymnal numbers below; other hymnals or sources as noted)

433 In the Bulb There is a Flower - Chalice 638

425 For the Fruit of All Creation - Chalice 714

586 Come to Tend God’s Garden

I Shall Not be Moved - Chalice 615

For Beauty of Meadows - Chalice 696

Restless Weaver - Chalice 658

Mountain Brook with Rushing Water - Chalice 690 (also works to the tune of Hymn to Joy or Hyfrydol)

God Who Touches Earth with Beauty - Chalice 514

When in Awe of God’s Creation - Chalice 688

Benediction I

From “Water, Holy Water...”)

May we forever exalt God and creation. Go in peace, enjoy God's gift of water, and work to preserve this sacred resource for the future. **Amen**

Benediction II

As God saved Noah's family and all living creatures from the flood, the Israelites from the waters of the Red Sea, and Jonah from the belly of the whale,

So we ask God's help and guidance to ensure clean water for all.

Be tireless and strong in caring for Creation, like a tree planted by streams of water

May our faith be strong and constant as a flowing stream.

More Hymn Suggestions:

There are many other creation and stewardship songs in the Chalice Hymnal (pages 688 – 698):

For those with access to The United Church of Canada's hymnal Voices United there are some wonderful creation-focused hymns under the section Creation and Providence (291-311) especially:

296 A more inclusive version of This Is My Father's World - This Is God's Wondrous World

297 All Praise to You (Stewards of Earth) set to Finlandia is especially moving

Sermon and Service Ideas:

- Have volunteers bring a bottle of water from their home faucet (groundwater), a local spring pond, wetland, small stream, and a river. You can also include snow or rain if available. Put each sample in a clear vase on the altar. Have them (or someone) share where the water came from, and why this source of water is important (where does it drain to, how is it used, what lives in it, etc.). Use the "Prayer for the Blessing of the Waters" above or similar prayer to conclude this visual portion of the service.
- Put a map of your watershed on a bulletin insert as an illustration of local waters.
- Have a participation time during the sermon or service when people can name their favorite waterbody, and why they love it. Where will they go to play as soon as it's warm again? By what waterbody do they feel closest to God, and most at peace? Have them picture this place in their mind while a reader shares Psalm 46:4-5.
- The Chalice Hymnal has a good Litany titled "Caring for the Earth" (number 694) that could be used at some point in the service.

Things to do:

- Stay informed and engaged on water issues. Attune your lifestyle, purchases, and voting to promote clean water and earth-friendly practices.

- Take a walk in the rain – where does the runoff from your property and neighborhood go? Is the water clean as it collects and flows away, or is it full of sediment, turbidity, yard waste, and litter? Does it safely seep back into the ground? Is it treated (by a rain garden, stormwater pond or other practice) before entering a ditch, stream or river? Are plastic wastes or other contaminants being carried to the nearest water?
- Harvest the rain (rescue the raindrops!) – install rain barrels to capture rainwater for lawn watering, or a rain garden to collect and purify runoff before it seeps into the ground.
- Find out what programs your local community has for stormwater prevention and treatment.
- Become a Citizen Scientist by volunteering to monitor a local lake or stream. More information is available at <http://watermonitoring.uwex.edu/wav/> (for streams) and <https://dnr.wi.gov/lakes/clmn/> (for lakes).

Other Resources:

“Water, Holy Water” from Creation Justice Ministries – available as a pdf on the Wisconsin Conference UCC Creation Care webpage <http://www.wcucc.org/resource-center/justice-ministries/environmental-justice/>

This year’s Creation Justice Ministry Earth Day Liturgy resource “The Next Generation Rises;” has more information is available at this link <http://www.creationjustice.org/earth-day-sunday.html>

Wisconsin Lakes Book – listing of all lakes by county (DNR Publication)
<https://dnr.wi.gov/lakes/lakebook/wilakes2009bma.pdf>

Supplemental files for this service order are included on the Wisconsin Conference UCC Creation Care webpage <http://www.wcucc.org/resource-center/justice-ministries/environmental-justice/>, including:

- Bulletin Cover Photo
- Feast of Creation Communion Service
- Children’s sermon from Rev. Joylynn Graham, Plymouth UCC - Dodgeville, Wisconsin
- “Water, Holy Water” Resource Material from Creation Justice Ministries