

Earth Day & Climate Justice Rituals for Worship

Brainstorming Summary

Winter 2024

In January 2024, Revs. Erika Hewitt and Sara Smalley convened two small groups of UU clergy to pool our creative wisdom about the creation of rituals and the crafting of worship related to Earth Day, climate justice, and other nature-based needs.

The following notes are a compilation of those two gatherings. Few names are attached, so interpret the ideas below in ways that are most useful to you!



What makes ritual meaningful?

The opportunity to receive a blessing

Logistical ease

A “sticky” & memorable metaphor or symbol

Embodiment practices

Sensory experiences, e.g., ambient sound or lightning, mindful eating exercise

Opportunities to *feel* emotions

Pairing grief/lamentation with possibility

It needs to catch or capture the non-rational mind (and body).

True connection/engagement

Connection between the embodied “action” of the ritual & its feeling/spirituality

Connection to what matters in people’s lives in the season

Engaging folks with the topic in a different way that gets past the rational mind

Connecting ourselves with That Which is Greater than We Are

Play, laughter, surprise

Fresh images or materials that are not typical for the theme



What images or metaphors invoke Earth care/interdependence?

- Mycelium networks
 - Starling murmurations
 - Aspen groves, redwood groves
 - Sprouts
 - Butterflies
 - Bees
 - Changing leaves
 - Water images (as a method of connecting to interdependence and care)
 - Soil and seeds: what are each of us planting?
 - Interconnection/invisible threads
 - Tree (seedling) planting in the forest or a place where forest has been/can be.
 - Composting//relationship with the full cycle of life//walking with our shadows
 - [Nurse logs](#) – the growth and life is beautiful even when it's taken a different form
 - Soil, seeds, cross-section images of land above and below
 - Photosynthesis
 - Survival / thrival
 - Fungi underground network
 - Tree underground network
 - Fractal theology
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What are some ideas you want to play with liturgically?

- Not just “bringing” our water (for Ingathering), but honoring the literal sources of our drinking water & pledging to care for it and protect access to it
- Fungi as survival / thrival model. Fungi as the great recyclers of the earth, the making-do-ers, the making new-ers, the weirdos of life on Earth, the requirers of discernment (some are poison, some are delicious). And a mushroom communion!
- Earth gets the final word, with or without us
- Scent — fresh crushed spruce needles, local soil, fresh or dry herbs, cut fruit
- Sprinkle water on folks with evergreen branches
- Take away pollinator seed packets

- Sensory element: play sounds of rainfall, babbling brook, etc.
- Child dedication with all the elements - placing dirt on their feet with soil important to the family
- We drop stones in water for Joys & Sorrows. We say aloud that after service our Worship Associate will take the water outside and return it to the earth with our blessings.
- Earth Day and Passover overlap (via Kristina Spaude)
 - Exodus story with Nachshon ([one example](#))
 - Reimagining the 10 Plagues as 10 different elements of the climate crisis
 - I used Rachel Naomi Remen's "All Life Needs is Your Faithfulness" as a reading with [this service](#) (I used this passage through the last "all it needs is your faithfulness," not the last paragraph)
- Weaving (from natural materials — straw, leaves, etc) "bandaids" to be blessed and then placed on the earth in places that need them.
- Nature/natural mandala – elements from nature (leaves, rocks, twigs, etc) used to create some co-created design; also the deconstruction of mandala
- [Dirt Ceremony](#) - listen to the Earth - the Earth gives the sermon
- Create a collective altar of nature elements and what they have to tell/teach us
- Planting seeds
- Ambient nature sounds
- Lamentation: in memoriam for extinct species that year
- Tree of Mourning: what have we lost, or what are we losing?
- How do we bring action forth out of worship - going forth into the world? (e.g. river clean up, native plants garden, pollinator garden)
- Have people sit with / meditate on something from nature that they choose. Describe it in three words. Then wonder: how do those words describe you in this work?
- Universal Body Prayer
- Bring in an array of nature objects: seed pods, pine cones, twigs, feathers, etc. and people can choose one to meditate on, etc.... or build mandalas outdoors
- Worship series related to biomes & metaphors from each (e.g., desert, islands & sea, rainforest, etc.)
- During our complete property renovation, we polluted an already polluted tiny runoff creek near our property. I have apologized to the creek from the pulpit, but maybe we could do a communal ritual of apology, accountability and connection with the creek.
- "Listening to the River" Exercise – invitation to four "Water Listeners":

- I'm putting the Water Communion service together and there's something special we want to do. We are looking for volunteers to offer water collected from specific local rivers, and say some words about that river. What we're looking for is that you would collect the water, and then also take time to really listen to the river and see if it has any messages for us. What do you imagine the river wants you to tell us? How do you feel when you're sitting beside it and listening? These may be messages about the environment but it could truly be anything. During the service there will be a time for you to pour the water from your river into the water communion bowl and speak the messages of the river to the congregation. Is this something you would have the time and interest in doing? I am seeking recruits for the [names of 4 rivers]. Would you be interested in this project, and if so, which river would you like to go connect to?
- Taryn Strauss: THE DEEP as a 3-month Worship Series (within the annual theme of *Devotion*). Sample Worship Topics:
 - Ingathering: Returning to the Well
 - Certain Uncertainty- how do I know I am on the right path? discernment
 - Camera Obscura and the Art of Focus -how to stay focused and clear in a world that would keep you superficial and distracted
 - Daily Life a Temple- spiritual depth means daily practice
 - The Angler Fish Speaks- fierce, bold, bright hope in the murkiness
 - Casting Questions into the Deep
- Karen Johnston's monthly series using "Earth teachers" of gravity, mud, rocks & stones
 - online 75 minute session - one per month - journaling, small group on each earth teacher.
 - one packet per month on each earth teacher, including poems, etc.

additional resources to explore

- [The Work that Reconnects](#) (Joanna Macy):
Coming from Gratitude, Honoring Our Pain for the World,
Seeing with New/Ancient Eyes, Going Forth
- [Resilience hubs](#)

- Royalty-free photos (especially Earth/nature): [Unsplash](#) and [Pixabay](#)
- *The Mushroom at the End of the World* by [Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing](#)
- *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown
- *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, by Alexis Pauline Gumbs
- Mourning Nature - Anthology about grief in terms of climate change
- Biomes: ocean and whale sounds and kelp/seaweed communion; desert spirituality
- Meditation - accompanied by drumming - about what life under climate justice would look like: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1090391075657045> - Reilly Yeo
- Material from Ursula K. LeGuin's "Always Coming Home" (a very embodied exploration of life in an imagined future — mostly in N. California). Song, poems, practices, ritual...
- Mary Oliver
- Wendell Berry
- Joy Harjo
- J. Drew Lanham (*Sparrow Envy: Field Guide to Birds and Lesser Beasts*)
- Camille T Dungy (*Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden*)
- Earth Prayers (book)
- McFague's universe as God's body; de-centering humans and re-centering us as responsible stewards
- Sacred Nature - Karen Armstrong
- CryptoNaturalist [on Instagram](#) (Jared K Anderson) (also has a podcast!)
- Orion: Nature and Culture ([a quarterly magazine](#))
- [Morning Altars: A Seven Step Practice to Nourish Your Spirit through Nature, Art, and Ritual](#) – this is a great book for making nature mandalas, and how to do so with intention before, during, and after creation. [Ebook too](#).
- Stay Cool: Why Dark Comedy Matters in the Fight Against Climate Change by Aaron Sachs
- "The Next Right Thing" (song from Frozen)
- Joy Berry's [Dirt Communion on WorshipWeb](#)

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If you have questions about this document, please [contact WorshipWeb](#).