

Earth Hour Vigil

Prepared by members of the Roman Catholic–United Church Dialogue in Canada

Introduction

The following suggestions are intended to help congregations, parishes, and other groups observe, in prayer and worship, international Earth Hour on the fourth or fifth Saturday of March. The purpose of Earth Hour is to call attention to the beauty and fragility of our living planet. The point of worship is to call people together in thanksgiving and prayer to God, united in a living faith. We hope that these Earth Hour prayers help the faithful to celebrate creation while committing to compassionate action for its well-being. You can find out more about Earth Hour, marked from 8:30–9:30 p.m. local time, at www.earthhour.org.

If you'd prefer to adapt the following to another time and place, we encourage you to do that.

Provided here are suggestions that congregations, parishes, and other groups are welcome to use and adapt. Particulars of space, participants, culture, and creativity should help shape the celebration. In some cases, we offer our own variations for selection. What should be chosen is whatever best serves the group in its prayer. If you are republishing or redistributing the materials, please acknowledge if adaptations have been made.

This vigil is composed with an eye to avoiding the need to print and distribute materials or aids. Since Earth Hour directly questions our patterns of consumption and invites us into simpler living, we wanted to practise breaking patterns in this celebration. Appropriate hymns, found in whatever hymnals are at hand, are thus recommended at the start and close of these prayers, when the space is lit.

Four readers need to be coached on the importance of unrushed, clear reading. Two need to be prepared to read scripture and prayers, and the other two will read passages from Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* encyclical and The United Church of Canada's Song of Faith. We suggest that scripture and other readings be printed out clearly for each reader according to their parts, to be read by candlelight. You will also need a team for candlelighting, and someone with a confident voice to teach and lead singing.

Participants enter the worship space, which is fully, even excessively, lit by artificial lights, at 8:00 p.m. At 8:15 p.m., a leader welcomes the congregation with these or similar words:

Welcome

Leader: Welcome to our Earth Hour Vigil service. This is our opportunity to join as Christians and with others in the ancient practice of evening prayers—and in the new practice of pausing together to recognize Earth Hour. We join tonight with people of faith and goodwill around the world in marking Earth Hour, a grassroots movement uniting people to protect the planet, organized by the World Wildlife Fund. Engaging a massive mainstream community on a broad range of environmental issues, Earth Hour started as a lights-off event in Australia in 2007. It now involves more than 7,000 cities and towns around the world. Earth Hour is not just a one-hour event but a much larger movement.

This is an ideal time to join our hearts and minds in unrushed prayer, reflection, and intention for action.

Throughout this hour you will hear words read from The United Church of Canada's Song of Faith and from Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* in addition to the scripture. We will lead you in prayerful words and into times of prayerful silence.

(Scripture readings are provided in the NRSV translation. Please feel free to use other translations or paraphrases suitable to your context.)

Leader: We will sing the refrain from "My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning)" throughout the service.

(This hymn is written by Rory Cooney and set to STAR OF THE COUNTY DOWN or KINGSFOLD, a traditional Irish melody. It is found in numerous hymn books representing a variety of traditions, as you see from the following list offered at hymnary.org:

The United Church of Canada's More Voices 120
Evangelical Lutheran Worship 723
Gather (3rd ed.) 622
Gather Comprehensive 556
Gather Comprehensive, Second Edition 527
Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal 100
Hymns for a Pilgrim People: A Congregational Hymnal 88
Hymns of Promise: A Large Print Songbook 75
Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs 69
Psalms for All Seasons: A Complete Psalter for Worship 75B
Worship (4th ed.) 624

You can listen to the full song to help learn the refrain at www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9QeTmRCpW4.)

Leader: Let us practise it now:

My heart shall sing of the day you bring...

(An option to consider with youthful gatherings: Before the first hymn, invite participants to set their phone alarms with this invitation: "You may be accustomed to being asked to turn off your cell phone at a moment such as this. Instead, we invite you now to pull out your cell phone if you wish. In a moment we're going to invite you to set your alarm for X minutes, which we expect to be the time when we'll be ending our first hymn and having the lights dim. When the alarms sound, we'll invite you to then turn off your phone, marking the transition from high-energy use in our busy world to a quiet hour of prayer and reflection. For those who would like to do this, we invite you now, on the count of three, to set your alarm to ring in X minutes."

Note: You will have needed to time the first hymn to know what length of time to set the alarm.)

Leader: Now let us begin our service by singing a familiar hymn.

(We invite you to select and announce a hymn appropriate to your context. Some possibilities: "How Great Thou Art," three verses, not original third, changing "works" to "worlds" and "mighty" to "rolling"; "All Creatures of Our God and King" or "For the Music of Creation" (Voices United 535); "To Show by Touch and Word" (VU 427), possibly with a more familiar tune—LODWICK 12 12 88; "For the Beauty of the Earth" (VU 226, CBW); "This Is God's Wondrous World" (VU 296), "Called by Earth and Sky" (More Voices 135).

8:30 p.m.: Lights are dimmed and turned off, phones are turned off, and candles are lit at the lecterns and scattered as needed for safety.)

Prayer

(Encourage all readers to offer the spoken words clearly and at an unrushed pace.)

Leader: At several points in this prayer, we invite you to join us in repeating the words: "We give thanks for your Spirit breathing through the web of life." Let's say it together now, as we begin:

All: We give thanks for your Spirit breathing through the web of life.

Reader 1: We are in awe of your creation.

Reader 2: We are in awe of your creation.

Reader 1: We breathe in with amazement at the beauty of it all.

Reader 2: We breathe out with gratitude for all that you provide.

All: We give thanks for your Spirit breathing through the web of life.

Reader 1: We give thanks for air, the flow of life.

Reader 2: We give thanks for water, the flow of life.

Reader 1: We give thanks for land and all those who have lived here before us.

Reader 2: We give thanks for land, and all plants, creatures, all my relations who live here with us now.

All: We give thanks for your Spirit breathing through the web of life.

Reader 1: We give thanks for your life-giving love, of which we are part,

Reader 2: your life-giving love, which we see in the rising of bulbs and buds,

Reader 1: your life-giving love, which we see in the rising of people who love you and your creation.

All: We give thanks for your Spirit breathing through the web of life.

Reflection and Meditation

Leader: In silence let us remember and give thanks for God's Spirit breathing through the web of life.

(We suggest allowing five minutes for silence.)

Singing

(Song leader begins singing the refrain of "My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning)" and invites all voices to join in the second time:)

My heart shall sing of the day you bring...

Leader: *(Introduction to scripture)* While it may be true that humanity's sacred stories don't speak about the intricacies of climate change and other aspects of today's ecological crisis, they do illuminate matters of right and wrong. They are an archive of human dreams, a narrative of inspiration, God's call to rise to the occasion. We will now hear voices of scripture, along with the voices of our churches today, as found in *Laudato Si'* from Pope Francis, and in A Song of Faith from The United Church of Canada.

Reader 1: Listen to words of scripture from Deuteronomy 30:15–19 (NRSV) *(you might also use The Green Bible edition of the NRSV, which highlights all earth-friendly verses in green):*

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live....

Reader 2: Matthew 22:37–39:

He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Reader 3: Words from A Song of Faith:

Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator,
who is both in creation and beyond it.
All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related...

In and with God,
we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and with God.
We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.
We can grow in wisdom and compassion.
We can recognize all people as kin.
We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,
but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.

(Silent pause)

Reader 4: Words from *Laudato Si'*:

“Praise be to you, my Lord.” In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs.”
(LS 1)

Reflection and Meditation

Leader: In silence let us remember and hold in love the diversity of all creation with whom we share our home.

(Five minutes of silent reflection)

Prayer

Leader: We invite you to join us in repeating the words: “We long for your healing, your justice, your peace.” Let’s say it together now:

All: We long for your healing, your justice, your peace.

Reader 1: We are suffering and broken.

Reader 2: We are suffering and broken.

Reader 1: We have broken your web of life.

Reader 2: We have turned our back on you.

All: We long for your healing, your justice, your peace.

Reader 1: Air is hard to breathe, for us and for other creatures.

Reader 2: Water is too often polluted and defiled.

Reader 1: Land is weeping over lost forests,

Reader 2: lost songs of birds and other creatures, lost human songs too.

All: We long for your healing, your justice, your peace.

Reader 1: We are burdened by sin.

Reader 2: We ask for the gift of forgiveness.

Reader 1: Guide us toward reconciliation,

Reader 2: so that life may flow through us again, repairing the web of life.

All: We long for your healing, your justice, your peace.

Leader: In a moment of silence let us release the burden of sin and open ourselves to God’s forgiveness and reconciliation.

(Silence)

Singing

(Song leader begins singing the refrain of “My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning),” and all join in as comfortable:)

My heart shall sing of the day you bring...

Reader 1: John 1:1–5:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Reader 2: Romans 8:18–23a:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves....

Reader 3: Words from the encyclical regarding our common home:

[Our] sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will.... We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. (LS 2)

(Silent pause)

Reader 4: Words from A Song of Faith:

The church has not always lived up to its vision.
It requires the Spirit to orient it,
 helping it to live an emerging faith while honouring tradition,
 challenging it to live by grace rather than entitlement,
for we are called to be a blessing to the earth

Reflection and Meditation

Leader: In silence let us remember our calling to respond to the longing of creation and live as children of our Creator God...

(Five minutes of silent reflection)

Singing

(Song leader begins singing the refrain of “My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning),” and all join in as comfortable:)

My heart shall sing of the day you bring...

Reader 1: John 15:1:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.”

Reader 2: Colossians 1:15–20:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Reader 3: Words from *Laudato Si'*:

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. (LS 13)

(Silent pause)

Reader 4: Words from A Song of Faith:

Divine creation does not cease
until all things have found wholeness, union, and integration
with the common ground of all being.
As children of the Timeless One,
our time-bound lives will find completion
in the all-embracing Creator.
In the meantime, we embrace the present,
embodying hope, loving our enemies,
caring for the earth,
choosing life.

Reflection and Meditation

Leader: In silence let us reflect on how we will join with Creator God and the Earth community, including one another in this community, in the work of healing.

(Five minutes of silence)

Invitation

Leader: We now invite you to share for five minutes with one or two others about what you will remember and carry into commitment from this hour together. We are inviting you to speak one after the other without comment or correction but rather deep listening and bearing witness to the other's commitment, ending with a simple thank you to one another. (*The five minutes could be lengthened or shortened a bit, depending on where you find yourself within the hour.*)

Prayer (no later than 9:20 p.m.)

Leader: We invite you to join us in repeating the words: "All creation gives you praise." Let's say it together now:

All: All creation gives you praise.

Reader 1: We are encouraged by this time of reconnecting.

Reader 2: We are grateful to be called,

Reader 1: called to participate in your reweaving of the web of life.

All: All creation gives you praise.

Reader 2: We will breathe deeply of your peace and justice.

Reader 1: We will move in the flow of your healing.

Reader 2: Our hearts will sing,

Reader 1: and we will give reason for the land to sing again too!

All: All creation gives you praise.

Reader 2: Our hearts will sing of the day you bring.

Reader 1: We will let the fires of your justice burn.

Reader 2: We will wipe away our tears,

Reader 1: and give reason for other creatures to wipe away their tears.

All: All creation gives you praise.

Leader: We invite you to sing together the refrain of "My Soul Cries Out (Canticle of the Turning)," one more time.

(Lights will gradually come up while singing it once, twice, or three times until the room is lit.)

My heart shall sing of the day you bring...

Blessing

Leader: And now, ready to live in the hope that God does indeed reconcile all things on earth and in heaven,

May the peace of God which passes all understanding
both settle and stir our hearts
to participate in the healing of creation,
in Christ Jesus.

AMEN

Leader: We invite you to go out from this hour in song. (*Offer any appropriate words of direction or closing, and invite the singing of “We Are Marching in the Light of God” or another song of your choosing.*)

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