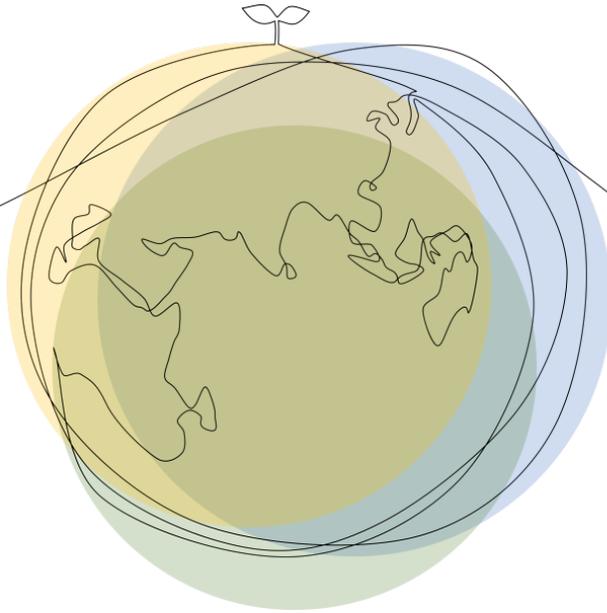


Final Project (due Aug 28)



entrusted

BACKGROUND

The United Church of Christ was an early leader in the cause of environmental justice and in the fight against environmental racism. The UCC’s emphasis on environmental racism has been strengthened by its relationship to our denomination’s strong stands and constituencies related to racial justice, a well-established ‘issue-based’ action strategy, and advocacy methods similar to that used for other justice work within the UCC.¹

The UCC Network for Environmental and Economic Responsibility (NEER) was formed in the late 1980s and early 90s as a grassroots effort with a broad eco-justice agenda. One of the statements that came out of an early NEER publication, stated:

“We believe that our planetary future is radically jeopardized by economic competition and growth unrestrained by a sense of limits about our place in the whole. Our love for our children and our children’s children requires us to raise serious questions about the level and methods of production and the wasteful style of consumption in the United States and other affluent nations and people. We affirm that a responsible, global economic system must distribute goods more equally and must recycle more effectively. We look for sustainable development and transparent, participatory decision making. We affirm the use of technologies which cooperate with the non-human roots of life on earth, instead of polluting and destroying them. We seek to cultivate attitudes of sacred covenanting among peoples and between humanity and the non-human creation.”²

¹ UCC Centers for Environmental Justice, https://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries_center-for-environmental-justice_background Accessed 8/25/20

² NEER 1992 Earth Summit in Rio,

This statement, though dated now in 2020, provides the launchpad for this resource called *Entrusted*. *Entrusted* is a collection of ideas, liturgy and other creative works that could be utilized by a pastor, youth leader or worship design team to supplement or shape a worship and/learning experience. It is my hope that however it is from to be useful, that the material here will help you and your congregation, youth group or Sunday School class wrestle with what it means to be entrusted by God with a responsibility to care for our planet.

You will be invited to engage and travel through three different movements:

1. *Confession*: This movement includes a practice of lament with the hope that we would acknowledge and grieve our part in the suffering of the earth community;
2. *Healing*: Understanding that this restorative process must come from a place of contrition and an appreciation for our current reality, as science and experience can attest to. Also, understanding that the Christian faith can provide a storehouse of resources that shed light on our identity and responsibility to the entire earth community.
3. *Action*: recognizing that this is a continuous process requiring perseverance and humility.

Whether you elect to incorporate each of these movements into a single service or lesson or spread them out over three or more sessions is entirely up to you as you assess your contexts and the needs of your people. Ultimately it is my prayer that, although inspired by a statement emerging out of the ecclesial context of the *United Church of Christ*, this resource may provoke the imaginations of persons of faith to explore more deeply what it means to be human participant in the entire earth community.

For the purpose of this **Final Project**, I will be focusing on the first movement of “*Confession*.”



1

CONFESSION

National Council of Churches website explains that caring for God’s creation requires lamenting how U.S. Christians have dominated indigenous peoples, cultures, and natural resources. More can be explored on this on their *creationjustice.org* website. Lamenting, or even confession, is not a discipline that many of us, at least in the mainline Protestant tradition have contemplated or practiced a whole lot of. But, I have heard it said: “Strong churches speak the language of lament.” And, while I’m not sure about lament being the signifier of ‘strong’ churches, I believe that in this instance, it is my hope that the practice of lament would give space for real honesty and grieving for the health of the world and its most vulnerable inhabitants.

In the context of environmental concerns, lamenting the damage that we – in predominantly industrialized and wealthy countries – have perpetuated against the world is more than appropriate. This resource considers lament to be a central and crucial element in Creation or Environmental Justice.

As you design and craft this first movement, here are some questions to ask:

- Does your context need information and education around our current environmental crises? What connection do you see between climate or environmental awareness and your immediate setting?
- What is the general feeling amongst your community regarding the role of humans in exacerbating climate change? What about mitigating against it?
- What is your denomination/regional community of churches/congregation’s current familiarity and involvement in environmental justice?
- What other areas of justice are at the forefront of your communities’ consciousness?
- Are issues of racism and environmental racism phenomena that your community need further education on?

These questions are in no way exhaustive, nor are they comprehensive of all the interconnected issues at play when we begin to think about ways in which our faith communities can engage in environmentalism. However, as you set out to plan this worship experience (whether you elect to combine all movement into one service or as a more extended experience) there is a sense that churches often jump in and out of issues like this and therefore only ever touch the surface of it.

The idea behind initiating this experience with the practice of lament, is to invite people to reflect on the ways our entire earth community has suffered, at our hands and the hands of others. It is, I believe, only from this place of contrition that healing and action can be truly effective in bringing about the peace, just and sustainable world that would allow for the flourishing of all God’s creation.

Here following, you will find a collection of resources and ideas that may be useful to use or spark thought into how you might want to craft your worship experience for your community.

MULTIMEDIA OPTIONS

Music:

Music, we know, has a powerful ability within a corporate worship context to focus our minds and our hearts on things that we may not otherwise notice. This training of the attention is extremely helpful in a service that is dealing with the weighty matters of our deteriorating planetary health. The selection of music below was assembled by the *Calvin Institute of Christian Worship* in their section entitled “Lament and Blessing” and offers selections that may be otherwise unfamiliar.³ Most are listed in *hymnary.org*.

“The Garden of the World (Lament for the Earth),”⁴ Shirley Erena Murray. This song from New Zealand helps worshipers confess that “the greening of all life is dying in our care” and plead, “We pray for one more chance to tend to earth’s repair!”

“Thank You, God, for Water, Soil, and Air,” Brian A. Wren. The first verse is: “Thank you, God, for water, soil and air, large gifts supporting everything that lives. Forgive our spoiling and abuse of them. Help us renew the face of the earth.”

“Isaiah the Prophet has Written of Old,” Joy F. Patterson, sung to the tune Judas and Mary. The second verse laments, “Your people despoil all the sweetness of earth; the brier and the thorn grow wild,” and pleads, “Lord, hasten to bring in your kingdom on earth, when no one shall hurt or destroy, when wisdom and justice shall reign in the land and your people shall go forth in joy.”

“Pelas dores deste mundo/For the Troubles,” Rodolfo G. Neto. This song from Brazil laments that “the whole creation’s laboring in pain,” and prays for God’s peace, power, and mercy.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Making a ‘land acknowledgement’ statement at the outset of your worship or learning experience is a formal way to pay tribute to the original inhabitants of the land you are currently occupying. Indigenous peoples have acknowledged one another’s lands for centuries, but in the past decade, some Western governments have begun to promote the practice.

³ <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/worship-resources-for-creation-care/>

⁴

An acknowledgment might be short: "This event is taking place on traditional Chickasaw land." Or it might be longer and more specific: "We are gathered today on the occupied territory of the Crow people, who have stewarded this land for generations."

The purpose of these statements is to show respect for indigenous peoples and recognize their enduring relationship to the land. Practicing acknowledgment can also raise awareness about histories that are often suppressed or forgotten.

Check out this online resource that can help you find out what First Nations tribes lived in your area: <https://native-land.ca> where you can simply insert your street address to receive the information.

Also, the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture offers a resource called "*Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment*,"⁵ created in consultation with more than a dozen Natives from various nations who recognized that while acknowledgment is common in indigenous spaces, it may be a new practice for non-Natives.

PRAYERS & LITANIES

Litany of Environmental Lament and Repentance from Melanesia⁶

God of the whole human race.
You have given us responsibility to care for each other.
But we have exploited and hated each other by our wickedness.
We turn to you in sorrow and repentance.
Please help us to look to you and care for each other.
Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

O God of creation.
You have created land for us to make our gardens and for trees,
animals and all living creatures on the earth.
Forgive us for our destruction of the land by logging and poisonous chemicals.
We turn to you in sorrow and repentance.
Help us O Lord to care for the land that you have given us.

⁵ U.S. Department of Arts and Culture offers a resource called "*Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgment*," <https://usdac.us/nativeland/> Accessed 8/25/20

⁶ Minister General for the Society of St Francis Br Christopher John, was recently asked by the Anglican Communion Environmental Network to ask Franciscans in Melanesia to write a litany of environmental repentance. Br Chris expanded the brief and held a short workshop for all four of the Orders in Melanesia to write the piece for Ash Wednesday. The Anglican Church of Melanesia includes 9 dioceses in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia. It is one of the areas of the world most vulnerable to climate change due to sea level rise. This litany has been slightly edited for the purposes of this resource. <http://www.mmuk.net/news/litany-of-environmental-lament-and-repentance-from-melanesia/> Accessed 8/25/20

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

God of the universe, the ocean and of love.
You have given us the ocean for fish, shells,
reefs, whales, waves, corals, and for ships and boats.
We have destroyed the ocean and everything in it, and not cared for it.
We turn to you in sorrow and repentance.
Please help us to care for the ocean, and to recognise that it is your blessing for us.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

God of the forest, in which all living things survive and
engage their life and move peacefully.
You have given us wisdom, knowledge and
understanding to use our resources well in a manageable manner.
We have been careless, short-sighted, and selfish and
failed to share with other people throughout the world.
We turn to you in sorrow and repentance.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

God of the universe, the God who created the atmosphere.
By your power of creation you made the sky so beautiful,
the sun to give us light during the day and the moon and
the stars to give light during the night.
You have given us clouds to bring rain and give life to your creatures.
Lord, we turn to you with a penitent heart for all the destructions
we have caused to the atmosphere.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

Merciful God, God of love and everything in this world.
You have created the rain, winds, storms, cyclones,
earthquakes, volcanoes and floods to renew your creation.
Help us to understand their existence in your world.
We turn to you in sorrow and repentance.
Please, Father, forgive us for the human activities which have overpowered the weather and
caused destruction of our environment.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

God you are our creator, the source of all wisdom and power.
You have created humans and animals and you have
entrusted us humans to be responsible for them.
Forgive us who destroy your creatures.

We turn to you in sorrow and repentance.
 Help us Lord to love and to care for them as you care for us.
 Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Lament as Prophetic Practice

Lament is an act of truthfulness, a profound expression of a people groaning for justice and appealing to their God to come and bring liberation. Why not read a Psalm, after all over a third of them are laments,⁷ and see how the different elements can give voice to one's pain and suffering, as well as one's reliance on God. This example below is from Psalm 10.

- i. Address. 'Why, Lord' (v.1).
- ii. Complaint. 'Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. ...' (vv.1–11).
- iii. Request. 'Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. ...' (vv.12–15).
- iv. Expression of trust. 'The Lord is King for ever and ever... You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed...' (vv.16–18).

Perhaps inviting people to write their own Psalm of Lament would allow time to slow down, articulate, and take time to reflection on their own questions, complaints and requests of God.

A Litany of an Environmental Confession⁸

- Reader 1:** God you created our planet, the birds, fish and other animals and you saw that all created things were good.
- Reader 2:** God of life, You also created us, the human family to be your viceroys and to act compassionately and gently towards all forms of life.
- ALL:** **Remind us, O God, and help us to change.**
- Reader 1:** We confess that we often forget that we are utterly dependent upon you and form an interdependent web with all living and non-living things.
- Reader 2:** God of creation, we confess that instead of acting compassionately and gently toward all forms of life, humanity had behaved wantonly

⁷ Biblical Laments: Prayer Out of Pain <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/biblical-laments-prayer-out-of-pain/> Accessed 8/25/20

⁸ Carlos J. Correa Bernier, Minister for Environmental Justice, United Church of Christ http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/6375/a_litany_of.pdf?1418430896 Accessed 8/25/20

and recklessly with the rest of your creation.

ALL: **Forgive us, O God, and help us to change.**

Reader 1: God of compassion, our land lies polluted under our feet, and we see members of the animal kingdom, on land and in sea, dying as a result of the contamination that we have created.

Reader 2: God of grace, we confess that we are damaging the earth, the home that you have given us through our consumerism and the use of products that are constantly polluting our air, land, and water, harming wildlife and endangering human health.

ALL: **Forgive us, O God, and help us to change.**

Reader 1: God of wisdom, help us understand that whatever we do to the web of life we do to ourselves.

Reader 2: God of power, help us acknowledge that we must act now and wake up to our moral obligations and that the future of our beautiful planet is in our hands.”

ALL: **Forgive us, O God, and help us to change.**

ALL: Today we confess that we have not done enough to protect our planet. We confess that we have failed to insist that our government set standards based on precaution. We confess that we, as consumers, have allowed companies to release dangerous toxins that destroy fragile ecosystems and harm human beings, especially those among us who are most vulnerable.

ALL: God of justice, help us understand the need and to send a clear signal to our political leaders about making the crucial choice between the present path of “destructiveness” - or the morally responsible path of compassion and respect for life, acknowledging our dependence upon you and our interconnectedness with all creation.

Reader 1: God of grace and salvation, today we open our eyes, ears, and hearts to the pain of our planet. We open our hearts to your truth, to see in you the way of healing and hope for our planet. We are beloved children of God, forgiven, renewed, and sent out into the world to work for the healing of our planet and for justice, in faithfulness to God.

Prayer of Confession⁹

Holy God, you cause rain to fall on the just and unjust. Sometimes we are part of the just, and sometimes we are part of the unjust. You have given us incredible gifts of soil,

⁹ Emily Hope Morgan, worship resources from *Unbound's* organizer. <https://justiceunbound.org/litany-for-earth-day/>
Accessed 8/25/20

water, and air that sustain our entire lives. When we are ungrateful, forgive us. When we forget to take care of those resources, forgive us. When we hoard these resources and keep them from others who need them, forgive us. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us to refresh us and renew us so that we can use the gifts you have given in us to care for each other and our earth. Amen.

SERMON TEXTS & TOPICS

For the teaching or preaching portion of your gathering, there are multiple sources of information and resources for structuring a sermon or lesson.

earthministry.org has provided a list of texts that may be a compelling basis for deeper study regarding Environment Justice and what they refer to as a “creation-honoring” worship service. <https://earthministry.org/worship/scripture/>

The *Calvin Institute of Christian Worship* have a wealth of resources for creation care and offer musical suggestions as well as other liturgical and elements on their website: <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/worship-resources-for-creation-care/>

SAMPLE SERMONS

Here are some sermons on climate care to give an idea what others have said on the subject, particularly in the UCC context. The links are included in the footnotes that will direct you towards the full manuscript. Also, *Interfaith Power & Light* have on their website numerous resources for crafting a sermon that addresses the climate crises from the texts of our Judeo-Christian faith traditions, amongst other religious traditions.

Title: “Our Neighbor Earth”¹⁰

Text: Mark 1:40-45

Date: Sunday, February 12, 2012

The Rev. Dr. Dan De Leon

Friends Congregational Church, UCC in College Station, TX

Title: “Ask, Seek, Knock”¹¹

Text: Luke 11:1-13

Date: Sunday, July 25, 2010

Meighan Pritchard, MDiv

Mira Vista United Church of Christ, El Cerrito, CA

¹⁰ <https://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Sermon-Feb-12-2012.pdf> This was a sermon crafted for the 2012 National Preach-in on Global Warming.

¹¹ <https://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Ask-Seek-Knock.pdf>

OTHER RESOURCES

Eco-Justice Ministries, <http://eco-justice.org/E-list.asp>. Rev. Peter Sawtell writes weekly articles called Eco-Justice Notes that are invaluable in linking current ecological themes/issues with faith and congregational life. You can get hundreds of sermon ideas from reading his past articles. Geared to Christian churches, but still helpful to an interfaith audience.

National Council of Churches, <http://www.ncccojustice.org/earthday/EarthDayIdeas.php>
Here you can find some great ideas about planning a complete Earth Day program that would be appropriate for just about any religion

Green Faith, <http://greenfaith.org/resource-center/spirit/eco-themed-worship-services>.
Provides prayers, references from sacred texts, and ideas for ecologically-themed worship.

Envirolink, <http://earthday.envirolink.org/guide6.html> provides a variety of ideas appropriate for both church and community events on Earth Day



2

HEALING

This second movement is decidedly more hopeful than the first, however the reality of grief and suffering must not be forgotten as you move to focus on healing. For it is only by keeping our current reality at the forefront of our awareness that we can hope to meet that need in some meaningful and effective way. Just as forgiveness follows confession, so does a reminder of who we are and how we can act to move our communities towards a more peaceable, just and sustainable world.



3

ACTION

This third and final movement is one of action. Whether framed as love made visible, renewal of our covenant with the earth and the other inhabitants, or as sacred activism, the hope is that you would spend was time crafting an action plan for your congregation, youth group or Sunday School class to begin to practically address the environmental issues pertinent in your community.

To help you get started, you may want to:

- Identify your community (geographically, socially, culturally, religiously, economically etc.)
- Identify the environmental concerns
- Identify the major contributors to the previously discovered problems
- Identify who has the power to change the situation.
- Craft your goals.
 - Make them S. M. A. R. T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely).
 - Make a distinction between: short-term (3-6 months), medium-term (6-12 months), long term (1-5 year) goals.

If an approach like this is prohibitive for your group, for whatever reason, ask:

- how else can you act?
- who is already doing this work that needs support?
- what role can I/we play?

Paragraph of Self-Assessment (due Aug 28)

In preparation for this course, I planned out and started my readings and documentary-viewings well in advance and as a result was able to complete almost every single required and recommended source before the first day of class. I found the material deeply interesting and enjoyable. It struck a chord within me that moved me from self-reflection and (at times) despair, to appreciation, wonder and hope. I believe that I participated well in class and rather than dominating the discussion, I hope that I listened and invited conversation amongst the broader class. I appreciated the diversity of voices, from the readings as well as from my classmates, particularly those who are entering different vocations than myself.

On the balance of all the requirements of this course: coming to class prepared, 3 oral reports, preface and notebook, general participation and final project, I believe that an A-grade reflects my work.