# Earth Sunday Service: For the Love of Creation

# April 21, 2024

## Intro

This service is an invitation for communities to act, learn, and pray for climate justice as part of [For the Love of Creation’s second annual Earth Week](https://fortheloveofcreation.ca/earth-week-2024/). Creatively adapt these ideas for your context. Congregations might consider holding a [Faithful Climate Conversation](https://fortheloveofcreation.ca/engagement/) before or after the service.

Last year, more than 100 communities of faith participated in Earth Week. Events included Earth Sunday services, Faithful Climate Conversations, Earth Day Concerts, Faithful Footprint Retrofit tours, public lectures on climate justice, a People’s Parade for Life, a Resurrect Your Bike event, collecting signatures for Give It Up for the Earth letter to Minister Guilbeault, a Wild Church Service, a prayer hike, a forest bathing walk, planting trees and gardens, and more.

You can find more prayers, reflections and related spiritual practices, in the new United Church Lenten devotional: [*Act/Fast: Spiritual Practices for a Climate in Crisis*](https://ucrdstore.ca/products/act-fast-spiritual-practices-for-a-climate-in-crisis).

## Prepare

Have a sign with a basket or offering plate and some appropriate symbols for each of the following words:

* **Act:** a symbol of water, or another symbol that tells a story of hope for your community
* **Learn:** seeds, protest placards, word art, prayer wall, or another symbol that conveys the importance of remaining informed and learning what might be the best conditions for growth and transformation
* **Pray:** prayer wall, stones, candles, or another symbol of a living faith in action

Provide each congregant with three different sheets of recycled paper, the first with the word Act, the second with the word Learn, and the third with the word Pray along with some pens or pencils. Alternatively, you could have larger sheets of paper with these words at each of the stations that people could write on during the offering or before/after the service.

Review the [interactive map](https://fortheloveofcreation.ca/earth-week-2024/) of all the events being organized across Canada. Add your Earth Sunday service as an event. What events are happening online or nearby that you could invite your community of faith to participate in? What events inspire you to draw attention to during your service? How can you hold this common effort in prayer during the service?

With children, consider using [Lessons from Nature about Living with Climate Change](https://davidsuzuki.org/what-you-can-do/lessons-from-nature-about-living-with-climate-change/) from the David Suzuki Foundation.

Please register your service as an event. It may attract guests and will enable you to be connected in the future to other climate efforts. You can read more on [The United Church of Canada’s Climate Change page](https://united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/climate-change) and [The United Church of Canada Foundation’s Climate Justice page](https://www.unitedchurchfoundation.ca/about-the-foundation/priorities/climate-justice/).

## Land Acknowledgement

## Lighting of Christ Candle

## Call to Worship

One: Whether we live near mountains or in the prairies—
**All: We are one in Christ.**
One: Whether our winters are balmy or our summers are cool—
**All: We are one in Christ**.
One: Whether we live near the Atlantic, Pacific, or Arctic Ocean or somewhere in the middle—
**All: We are one in Christ**.
One: Whether we live in urban dwellings, nestled in the suburbs, or surrounded by a rural landscape—
**All: We are one in Christ**.
One: In a spirit of unity, caring for each other and the whole of creation—
**All: We are one in Christ.**

—*Adapted from the Rev. Michelle L. Torigian, “*[*Be the Church: Protect the Environment*](https://michelletorigian.com/category/be-the-church/)*” worship service.* © 2016 Rev. Michelle L. Torigian. Free to use with attribution.

*or*

Behold, how manifold are God’s works!
**God has made them all in wisdom.**
The earth is God’s and everything in it.
**Let all of creation praise God’s awesome deeds!**

## Opening Prayer

As we gather, we are thankful for your Creation:
 for light and darkness;
 for air, wind, and sky;
 for earth and sea;
 for seeds, harvests, and plant life;
 for sunlight, moonlight, and starlight;
 for every living creature, swarming, flying, creeping, and grazing;
 for our lives.
In our actions, meditations, and prayers,
may we honour and celebrate your very good Creation,
as we seek wisdom on how to share our gratitude and love in good and healing ways.
Amen.

—*Written by Alydia Smith. From Alydia Smith, ed.,* Act/Fast: Spiritual Practices for a Climate in Crisis *(Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2023), p. 127. Free to use with attribution.*

## Opening Hymn

“We Plough the Fields and Scatter” (*Voices United* 520)
“For the Beauty of the Earth” (*Voices United* 226)

## Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Grace

Creator God,
we come before you in a time of crisis.
We know that much of your creation struggles;
we begin to see and acknowledge the changes around us;
we search for the causes and the cures and the collaborative ways we can commit to care for creation.
We want to do what’s right
but we don’t always know what that is
 or agree how best to do it.
Help us learn what we must,
 listening to the diverse voices of creation itself.
Help us understand and love what you have loved and called “very good.”
Enliven that understanding, we ask,
to allow ourselves to be moved to act as we should and to halt actions that harm.
Guide us as we try to discern how best to truly listen to each other as well as creation
and heed your call.
We ask for forgiveness where we have taken too much or cared too little,
 for hearts willing to listen and change and will to follow through.
May the knowledge of your presence and the assurance of your love
shape our time here and always.
We pray in your name, Amen.

*—From For the Love of Creation,* [*Earth Sunday Service*](https://fortheloveofcreation.ca/resources/)*, 2023.* Free to use with attribution.

*or*

God of change, we want to be transformed:
Where there is forgetfulness about the earth,
may I be a remembrance of your love for the earth.
Where there is unawareness of relationship with the earth,
let me remind people, we are the earth.
Where there is only talk about private property,
may I remind folks that the earth belongs to you.
Where there is a sense of ownership, when we think we own the earth,
let me say out loud that we belong to the earth.

When we only talk and preach and pray about humans,
let me pray with animals and plants, trees and rivers and mountains.
Where there is only talk about heaven,
let me speak about the earth hurting right now.
Where there is a spirituality of words only,
may I touch the ground, lean on a tree, hold a plant, touched the water, breathe a long breath. and listen to the birds.
Amen.

*—Adapted from Cláudio Carvalhaes, “*[*Lenten Journey with the Earth through the Stations of the Cross*](https://www.claudiocarvalhaes.com/blog/lent-2021-stations-cross-earth/)*” (Lent 2021 blog), claudiocarvalhaes.com.* Free to use with attribution.

## Sung Response

“It’s a Song of Praise to the Maker” (*More Voices* 30)

## Learning Time: Introduce Earth Week and Describe Act, Learn, and Pray

### Story: Protecting the Tree

An ‘i‘iwi1 (a Hawaiian bird) overheard some people talking one day about a disease that was harmful and even fatal to ‘ōhi‘a2 trees. He followed them and listened closely as they took care to clean their shoes and avoid bringing the fungus spores to where healthy trees were. The ‘i‘iwi decided that he would help protect his favourite ‘ōhi‘a tree.

It wasn’t a very big tree, which was one of the reasons it was his favourite. It had a nice shape and plenty of leaves and it tended to blossom quite freely, which made it a great place to find safety and enjoy a good meal of ‘ōhi‘a nectar. And because it wasn’t very big, it was a size that the bird could guard.

Guard it he did. When other birds came by—‘apapane, ‘amakihi, mejiro, and even the little ‘elepaio3—he drove them off. They squawked and complained, but a determined ‘i‘iwi is difficult to convince, so they all went to other trees.

The ‘i‘iwi then set out to make sure that the tree was safe from being infected by insects that might carry the dangerous fungus. He flicked bugs off the leaves and branches with his wings, with his toes, and with his long, curved beak. The spiders and insects didn’t try to argue. It’s hard to argue when something many times your size has kicked you off a branch when you’re a long way up in the air. Some tried a second or a third time but found the ‘i‘iwi ready for them, so they headed off as well.

The ‘i‘iwi found himself pretty much alone in the tree, and quite satisfied, settled down to sleep as night fell, prepared for another day of defending his favourite tree.

1. Pronounced ee-EE-vee.

2. Pronounced oh-HEE-ah.

3. Pronounced ah-pah-PAH-nay, ah-mah-KEE-hee, me-JEE-roh, and el-uh-PIE-oh.

As the wind moved the tree limbs, however, his dreams turned strange. It seemed like the tree was speaking to him. “Why are you doing this?” asked the tree. “Why are you chasing everyone away?”

In a dream, of course, you can talk to trees, so the ‘i‘wi said, “I’m keeping away everything that might make you sick. I want to keep you well.”

The tree creaked thoughtfully for a few minutes—trees think long and deeply—before replying.

“That’s good of you,” said the tree. “I appreciate the thought. But has it occurred to you that if no one visits me, my flowers don’t become seeds?”

That had not, in fact, occurred to the ‘i‘iwi, who hadn’t known it. Most plant blossoms attract creatures like honeybees, who in travelling from flower to flower bring the pollen that enables the blossoms to produce seeds. In the ‘ōhi‘a forest, this gets done by bees, and beetles, and birds such as the ‘apapane and ‘amakihi, and yes, the ‘i‘iwi.

“If nobody visits other trees, and nobody visits me, there won’t be any seeds,” explained the tree.

The ‘i‘iwi didn’t know what to do. “If they visit you, you might get sick,” he said, “but if they don’t visit you, there won’t be new ‘ōhi‘a trees.”

The tree limbs sighed in agreement. “We’ll have to chance it,” said the tree. “But thanks for the effort.”

“We’ll have to chance it,” said the ‘i‘iwi. “May it all go well.”

You and I can still help protect ‘ōhi‘a trees by cleaning our shoes before entering ‘ōhi‘a forests, not moving ‘ōhi‘a wood around, and taking care not to damage the tree bark when we’re in the forest. But the ‘i‘iwi and the birds and bees of the forest will also be sipping nectar and flying from tree to tree, and it’s risky, but it’s also how the next generation of ‘ōhi‘a will take root and grow.

— © *Rev. Eric S. Anderson, July 23, 2023, OrdainedGeek.com.* Free to use with attribution. *He includes a* [*video recording*](https://ordainedgeek.com/2023/07/23/story-protecting-the-tree/) *on his website.*

* In this story, the tree limbs and the i‘iwi have to chance it. What motivates them to take this risk? Why?
* When have we had to “chance it” compelled by love?

### Hymn

“Called by Earth and Sky” (*More Voices* 135)

“Are you a Shepherd?” (*More Voices* 126)

“The Lord is My Shepherd” (*Voices United* p. 747)

### Scripture

Psalm 23
1 John 3:16‒24
John 10:11‒18

### Reflection Ideas

#### 1. Have personal testimonies related to Act, Learn, and Pray.

This Earth Week, for the second year in a row, we are invited with ecumenical partners to Act, Learn, and Pray for Climate Justice.

The United Church of Canada is a founding member of [For the Love of Creation](https://fortheloveofcreation.ca/), a national faith-based coalition for climate justice. It enables us to work together under one banner to mobilize education, reflection, action, and advocacy for climate justice.

Climate change impacts us, the local ecosystems of which we are a part, and partners The United Church of Canada is connected with around the globe. The impacts of climate change are not borne equally or fairly between rich and poor, women and men, racialized and non-racialized, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, or older and younger generations. The greatest burden of climate change is falling on people in the Far North and global South—those who have contributed least to the problem.

Consequently, there has been a growing focus on climate justice, which looks at the climate crisis through a human rights lens and prioritizes responses and solutions that respect the rights and responsibilities of all peoples; expose and call to account the violations at the root of climate change; and move towards equity, justice, and right relations with all people and the earth. Climate justice, racial justice, Indigenous justice, gender justice, and economic justice are all interconnected. The challenge is big, the stakes are high, and working together we are stronger.

(*Note to planners: Some examples of what climate justice can look like are listed as examples on the* [*Earth Week 2024 - Together for the Love of Creation webpage*](https://fortheloveofcreation.ca/earth-week-2024/)*.*)

Consider introducing the congregation to this initiative and then asking three people to share a testimony on how their faith is calling them to act, learn, or pray for the climate.

You may get one person to speak to each of the areas, possibly drawing on the questions or stations that were set-up at the start of the service.

* **Act:** Testify to a story of hope in your community related to the climate, and/or share how they plan to act towards climate justice.
* **Learn:** Testify to the importance of remaining informed and learning what might be the best conditions for growth, sustainability, and transformation for creation, and/or share what they feel they need to learn more about to be a better advocate for climate justice.
* **Pray:** Testify to their living and active prayers for the climate—what are they and how do the prayers guide their actions—and/or share what is their prayer for climate justice?

#### 2. Reflect on the Good Shepherd

How do we discern what makes a Good Shepherd? How do we know who to follow? How are we being shepherded around creation care and climate justice? Which Shepherds are leading us in good ways, and which are leading us towards harmful and destructive ways?

The way of the Good Shepherd is always a way that leads towards abundant life for all people. How have paths that we have been on lead to destruction? How do we find our way back to the Good Shepherd and their pathway towards abundant, flourishing life for all?

#### 3. Silent Reflection

In addition to possible testimonies or a brief sermon, invite people into a guided time of silence building on the testimonies possibly shared during the reflection time. Invite people to use the sheets of paper provided to write, draw, or reflect on how they will share their unique gifts for the sake of creation.

* How will you **act** towards climate justice? (Hold up the Act sheet of paper.)
* What do you need to **learn** more about to be a better advocate for climate justice? (Hold up the Learn sheet of paper.)
* What is your **prayer** for climate justice? (hold up the Pray sheet of paper.)

For more sermon ideas, read the sermon starter for April 21 in [Gathering Lectionary for Lent/Easter, February 14-May 12, 2024](Gathering%20Lectionary%20for%20Lent/Easter%2C%20February%2014-May%2012%2C%202024), or the [Moving Past Climate Inaction](https://cpj.ca/moving-past-climate-inaction/) blog on the Citizens for Public Justice website (cpj.ca).

## Music

“We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky” (*More Voices* 143)

## Invitation to Offering

You are invited at this time to consider the multiple ways that you can give to the life, work, and ministry of this church and the wider church for the sake and love of creation.

We often think of our treasures as our monetary contributions. Your generous giving to Mission and Service helps to give [Kenyan farmers like Habtamu](https://united-church.ca/stories/knowledge-life-habtamus-story) the knowledge and support they need to replenish infertile soil and get higher and more sustainable crop yields through partners like the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

## Ministry of Music

Perhaps a musical selection that focuses on creation care.

## Offertory and Music (silent time)

(During the offertory, if people come forward in your community, invite them to add their Act, Learn, and Pray cards to the appropriate baskets, or add their thoughts to the sheets at each station, and to possibly take or interact with the symbols that you have prepared.

If the offering plate is passed around, also pass around the three baskets—Act, Learn, and Pray—from your stations and have them processed up with the offering.)

## Doxology

## Dedication Prayer: Acting, Learning, and Praying for Climate Justice

*Reader 1 (holds a symbol of Acting:*

God of Creation,
we are thankful for your awesome work in creation,
 you have weaved all of life together,
 and it is very good.
We are grateful for all that protects and cares for your good works:
 the sunlight and water that sustains life,
 the earth that grounds and nourishes life,
 and the earth-beings that care for and protect life.
We ask your blessings on the actions we offer here and on the actions of those across the church and beyond during this Earth Week.
God of Creation,
All: **Together we are stronger.**

*Reader 2 (holds a symbol of Learning):*

As we care for your creation,
provide us with the humility and curiosity needed
 to continually learn about the marvels of your works,
and to deepen our understanding of how our actions,
good and bad, affect all of creation.
We ask your blessing on the intentions we offer here today and on the intentions of those across the church and beyond during this Earth Week.
God of Creation
**All: Together, we are stronger.**

*Reader 3 (holds a symbol of Praying):*

Although the journey is hard,
and our hearts might be afraid and filled with doubts,
may we continue to act and learn towards climate justice,
with the confidence and strength of your presence guiding us.
We ask, in your love, to answer the prayers we offer today and the prayers of those across the church and beyond acting together during this Earth Week.
God of Creation:
**All: Together, we are stronger.**

May we continue to follow in the way that you are leading with hopeful and daring hearts,
until we have reached your commonwealth of justice and peace for all.
**All: Amen.**

—[*Brenda Riley of Knox United Church*](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1S-FLd5JUAo-ZZLu3Bkgu2qY-uHJXOTdw/edit)*’s adaptation from For the Love of Creation, “*[*Earth Sunday Service*](https://fortheloveofcreation.ca/resources/)*,” 2023.* Free to use with attribution.*.*

## Affirmation for the Earth

God of Love,
I bless the Earth with affirming words of life in fullness,
I affirm the rights of animals to live in honor.
I affirm the rights of rivers to be clean.
I affirm alternative forms of energy.
I affirm full life to the oceans.
I affirm the life of Jesus to the world as I remember Jesus’ denial.
In Jesus’ name, who was affirmed even when denied.
Amen.

—*Adapted from Cláudio Carvalhaes, “*[*Lenten Journey with the Earth through the Stations of the Cross*](https://www.claudiocarvalhaes.com/blog/lent-2021-stations-cross-earth/)*” (Lent 2021 blog), claudiocarvalhaes.com.* Free to use with attribution.*.*

## Prayers of the People

Creating God,
For the care that we can give and receive as your creatures,
we give you thanks.

For the care of…
 (name people and communities that offer and receive care)
Thank you.

And we ask for your care and protection over…
 (*name people and places in need of God’s care*).

As you receive the prayers of all creation, receive our prayers…
(open space for silence or communal prayers)*.*

We gather these prayers with the prayer Jesus taught us…

## The Lord’s Prayer

## Closing Hymn

“We Have This Ministry” (*Voices United* 510)

## Commissioning and Benediction

As we experience each tree, each flower, each bird, each bee, and each human,
let us feel our God reflected in creation.
As we look upon God's world,
let us share the love of Christ.
As we love one another, may your Spirit give us the strength we need to care for each and every part of creation.
Amen

—*Adapted from the Rev. Michelle L. Torigian, “*[*Be the Church: Protect the Environment*](https://michelletorigian.com/category/be-the-church/)*” worship service.* © 2016 Rev. Michelle L. Torigian. Free to use with attribution.

*or*

Go and act, for the care of creation.
Go and learn, for the sake of creation.
Go and pray, for the love of creation.
And may
the care of God enfold you,
the passion of the Risen Christ embolden you,
and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit empower you,
now and forever,
Amen.

—*Written by Alydia Smith. From Alydia Smith, ed.,* Act/Fast: Spiritual Practices for a Climate in Crisis *(Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2023), p. 125. Free to use with attribution.*