

# Earth Day General Program for Disciples Women

## **Purpose of this program**

To help Disciples understand their connection with and dependence on Earth's systems.

## **Leader notes**

To organize an Earth Sunday worship service based on this program, consider these ideas (as appropriate to your situation):

- Holding the service outside (people should dress comfortably);
- Seating people in a circle;
- Creating a display that includes soil, rocks, plants, feathers, and other naturally derived items (taking care not to cause harm to any being or remove items from protected areas);
- Include instrumental music that might evoke a reverent mood, such as Native American flute. If outside, simply sitting quietly and listening to the wind or birds would be appropriate.
- For children, allow them to be present as they are comfortable, if they wish to wander and explore during an outside service, let them. Perhaps invite them to see how many different kinds of creatures and plants they can find (and see who all can identify them).

## **Background information**

In the reflection, several items are introduced that may not be familiar to everyone, thus a little background research might be useful to the leader.

- Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions (Deterministic Chaos), also known as the Butterfly Effect
- Edward Lorenz: former MIT meteorologist Edward Lorenz
- Ray Bradbury: writer, see 1952 story, "A Sound of Thunder" (available online)

Also:

- Alverna Covenant: a Disciples covenant on Earth Stewardship

Wikipedia is a reliable resource for learning more about these topics. Visit [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page).

# Earth Sunday Worship

Gathering Music Native American Flute or listening to wind and birds

## Call to Worship

This is the day the lord has made; let us rejoice and be *exceedingly* glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

Hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth" 56 (Chalice Hymnal)

## Prayer of Gratitude

We rejoice in all life. ***We live in all things  
All things live in us***

We rejoice in all life. ***We live by the sun  
We move with the stars***

We rejoice in all life. ***We eat from the Earth  
We drink from the rain  
We breathe from the air***

We rejoice in all life. ***We share with the creatures  
We have strength through their gifts***

We rejoice in all life. ***We depend on the forests  
We have knowledge through their secrets***

We rejoice in all life. ***We have the privilege of seeing and understanding  
We have the responsibility of caring  
We have the joy of celebrating.***

We are full of the grace of creation  
***We are graceful  
We are grateful  
We rejoice in all life.  
Amen.***

(From "Only One Earth," a publication for "Environmental Sabbath/Earth Rest Day," June 1990; UN Environment Programme)

Scripture Deuteronomy 30:19 and Psalms 104.14-23

Reflection "On butterflies and Life"

Hymn "All Things Bright and Beautiful" 61 (Chalice Hymnal)

## Sending Forth

Grant us a spirit of love and concern for our natural world, from which we are not separate and on which we depend; Help us bring an end to the exploitation of the Earth's resources; Encourage us to be in better relationship with your Creation.

***Creator God, help us be in better relationship with Your web of creation.***

Grant us a spirit of respect and humility, recognizing the value and integrity of all Creation; Encourage us to be accepting of ourselves and of all other beings.

***Creator God, help us be in better relationship with Your web of creation.***

Grant us a spirit of openness to see God within and around us; Help us use our senses to celebrate beauty and creativity in the world.

***Creator God, help us be in better relationship with Your web of creation.***

Grant us a spirit of truth to recognize failings, which have hurt us, others, and the world; Give us the humility to ask forgiveness for our part in any wrongdoing;

***Creator God, help us be in better relationship with Your web of creation.***

Grant us a spirit of generosity to reach out in trust to all whom we encounter, whether they be two-legged, multi legged, winged, or finned; Help us to embody God's love in our relationships with one another and with all of Creation.

***Creator God, help us be in better relationship with Your web of creation.***

*(Revised from "The Poverty of Global Climate Change," a publication for Earth Day April 2008; National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program)*

## Benediction

May the Creator God be with you on this and every day. Go in peace as you strive to be in better relationship with the web creation.

**Benediction Music**      Native American Flute or listening to wind and birds

## Reflection: On butterflies and Life

Some of you probably thought I was going to come here today and tell you what you should and shouldn't do to save the Earth. I decided not to do that. Instead, I would like to talk about butterflies.

I've noticed in my community over the past couple of summers that the butterflies have been larger than usual, and more numerous. Several of us have theorized that the reduction in mosquito spraying (less rain sometimes means fewer mosquitoes) has led to the increase in size and numbers of these creatures. I wonder what this summer will bring.

Which reminds me of a newspaper article I saw in 2001. On the bottom right corner of the front page, a short story, indeed a seemingly insignificant story, appeared in the Indianapolis Star. The headline states, matter-of-factly, "300 exotic butterflies from exhibit are killed in accordance with rules." The butterfly exhibit at the Indianapolis Zoo closed as scheduled on September 10, 2001, and the remaining living butterflies were fumigated with a "deadly dose of insecticide." We all know what happened the following day.

What connection might a butterfly have to world events? Perhaps nothing. After all, that sounds crazy, doesn't it? On the other hand, if you subscribe to a scientific theory known as the Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions or deterministic chaos, the possibilities abound! Commonly known as the Butterfly Effect, as described by 1960s MIT meteorologist Edward Lorenz, this theory refers "to the fact that small, almost imperceptible happenstances or events, over time, can have huge and momentous consequences."

Is it possible? ... an imperceptible happenstance or event, such as the flapping of a butterfly's wings? Is it possible that the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Beijing, as Lorenz suggested, can affect the weather thousands of miles away? If a butterfly can have that much potential to cause change then, as you can see, ANYTHING is possible.

It's like when you toss a stone into the river and as it sinks to the riverbed, it alters the course of the catfish who happened to be swimming past, diverting it into the path of another fish that will become its meal. Meanwhile, all you see are the concentric rings on the river's surface that expand and fade in time from the initial event of the stone toss.

We have seen what is possible even in our spiritual life together. The good news is that we are gathered here today in witness of an outcome of a whole web of events that led to the arrival of a carpenter two thousand years ago. But it wasn't only about Jesus, it was also about the events of everyone around him and everything that ever preceded him ... and about the countless events of every life form that ever existed up to the point

of Jesus' existence. An imperceptible happenstance at any time could have led to quite a different outcome.

We are also here today because of events that led to the arrival of Rachel Carson, who wrote about pesticides in her book, *Silent Spring*, and Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, who asked, "Who speaks for the trees?" , and those Disciples who brought us the *Alverna Covenant* (a Disciples covenant on Earth Stewardship), and those who thought we should take a day each year to better understand our place in the web of life on Earth. And what about all of the other imperceptible events that brought you here today, the absence of any one of which could have led to a very different outcome?

As we gather here today, a day we recognize as Earth Day, is there something that you'll do today, knowingly or unknowingly, an event that might have huge and momentous consequences? I invite you to be attentive to your actions, to pay attention ... today ... and tomorrow ... and the next day.

And what about those potential butterflies in my community that are now emerging as caterpillars? Will one of them fall prey to a hungry robin? Or will another mature into butterfly-hood, who, with a flap of its wings, send a potentially devastating hurricane spinning away from landfall? Indeed, if the flapping of a butterfly's wings can alter the course of history, in big or small, but always significant ways, imagine the possible and "momentous consequences" of your actions within this web of life that is God's creation that we call Earth.

I am humbled by the possibilities.

*Written by Angela Herrmann, 2008, in observance of the 2008 Earth Day (may be reprinted only with permission of the writer and Disciples Home Missions). Note that while this reflection is personal, perhaps you can provide your own examples and yet convey the underlying message of how the outcomes of our actions can cause ripple effects across space and time.*

## History of the Alverna Covenant

The Alverna Covenant was written by members of the Task Force on Christian Lifestyle and Ecology of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) while meeting at Alverna Retreat Center, a Franciscan retreat in Indianapolis, Ind. The name has added significance. Alverna is named for Mt. Alverna in Italy, the mountain retreat given to Francis of Assisi. Francis is honored for his concern for the care of and relatedness of all creation. The 800th anniversary of Francis' birth was celebrated in 1981, the year the Alverna Covenant was first introduced at the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

### **The Alverna Covenant**

Whereas:

- \* God has created the world with finite resources;
- \* God has given to us the stewardship of the earth;
- \* God has established order through many natural cycles.

And it is evident that:

- \* We are consuming resources at a rate that cannot be maintained;
- \* We are interrupting many natural cycles;
- \* We are irresponsibly modifying the environment through consumption and pollution;
- \* We are populating the earth at a rate that cannot be maintained;

As a member of the human family and a follower of Jesus Christ, I hereby covenant that:

- \* I will change my lifestyle to reduce my contribution to pollution;
- \* I will support recycling efforts;
- \* I will search for sustainable lifestyles;
- \* I will work for public policies which lead to a just and sustainable society;
- \* I will share these concerns with others and urge them to make this Covenant.

To make the covenant, visit <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/>.

## Additional resources

### ***The Lorax*** by Dr. Seuss

A children's book first published in 1971. It chronicles the plight of the environment and the Lorax, who speaks for the trees against the greedy Once-ler (Available at your public library).

### **Your backyard**

Take some time to get acquainted with who lives outside around your house. You'll be amazed at what you'll discover.

Also, resources are available from Disciples Home Missions, Church Extension, and the National Council of Churches.