

Prayer SERVICE

Stewards of Creation

The following prayers were said at the Catholic Health System Leadership Forum on Environmentally Responsible Health Care, December 10, 2002.

AS WE ARE TOGETHER, praying for peace, let us truly be with each other.

Let us pay attention to our breathing.

Let us be relaxed in our body and our minds.

Let us return to ourselves and become wholly ourselves.

Let us be aware of the source of being common to us all and to all living things.

Evoking the presence of the Great Compassion, let us fill our hearts with our own compassion—toward ourselves and toward all living things.

Let us pray that all living beings realize that they are brothers and sisters, all nourished from the same source of life.

Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering to each other.

Let us plead with ourselves to live in a way that will not deprive other beings of air, water, food, shelter, or the chance to live.

With humility, with awareness of the existence of life, and of the sufferings that are going on around us, let us pray for the establishment of peace in our hearts and on Earth. Amen.

—Adapted from a prayer by Thich Nhat Hahn

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First Reader: And God stepped out on space and looked around. God said, "I am lonely—I'll make myself a world!" And, as far as the eye could see, darkness covered everything—black as a hundred midnights down in a cypress swamp. Then God smiled and the light broke! And the darkness rolled up on one side, and the light stood shining on the other. And God said "That is good!" And God took the light and made the sun and set it ablaze in the heavens. With the light left over from the sun, God gathered it into a shining ball and flung it against the darkness, spangling the night with the moon and the stars.

All: We join with Earth and with each other to rejoice in the sunlight and sing the song of the stars.

Second Reader: Then down between the darkness and the light, God hurled the world! And God said, "This is good!" Then God stepped down on the world and the sun was on the right and the moon was on the left and the stars were circling around. God walked, and his footsteps hollowed out the valleys and bulged the mountains up!

All: We join with Earth and with each other to bring new life to the land, to refresh the air.

Third Reader: Then God stopped and looked and saw that the land was dry and barren. So God stepped over to the edge of the world and spat out the seven seas. The lightning flashed and the thunder rolled. And the water above Earth came down.

All: We join with Earth and with each other to restore the waters, to celebrate the seas.

Fourth Reader: Then the green grass sprouted. The little red flowers blossomed. The pine tree pointed its finger to the heavens, and the oak spread out its branches. The lakes cuddled into the hollows of the ground. And the rivers ran down to the sea.

All: We join with Earth and each other to renew the forests and to care for the plants.

Fifth Reader: Then God smiled again and the rainbow appeared and curled itself over God's shoulder. And God said, "That is so good!" Then God's arm rose and waved over the sea and over the land, and God said, "Bring forth, bring forth!" And quicker than the arm could drop, fish and fowl, birds and beasts swam the rivers and seas, roamed the valleys and woodlands, and split the air with their wings. And God said, "This is good. This is very good!"

All: We join with Earth and each other to bring new life to the land and to protect the creatures.

Sixth Reader: God walked around and looked at all that was made—the sun, the moon, the stars and Earth with all its living creatures. And God said, "I am lonely still." So God sat down on the side of a hill and thought and thought. God thought, "I'll make a human." So God kneeled down in the dust and scooped up some clay from the bed of a river. God toiled over the lump of clay until it was in God's image. Then into it, God blew the breath of life . . . and man and woman became living souls.

All: We join with Earth and with each other to recreate the human community, to promote justice and peace, to remember our children. We join together as many and diverse expressions of one living mystery: for the healing of Earth and the renewal of all life.

—Adapted from "The Creation Story," by Betsy Beckman, and a prayer from the United Nations' Environmental Sabbath program

LITANY

Reader: Creator Lord and God, in your wisdom you have made us stewards of your Creation.

All: You have placed in our hands the responsibility of caring for creation—the beauty of this world: the mountains and the seas, the flowers and trees, the beasts, birds, bees, and all living creatures of any kind.

Reader: You have given us talents to use and to add to the wonder of Creation, through the arts, sciences, and technologies that know few limits. We have reached the moon on foot, explored the cosmos beyond our galaxy; explored the depths of the ocean floor; produced new forms of food to feed humankind; and developed new forms of communication and data media that allow us to read, see, and hear in digital modalities that we could only dream of a generation ago.

All: And yet we wonder, Creator, why does your creation cry out because of neglect?

Leader: Have we forgotten, or have we not learned, that the Creation is vulnerable because of our polluting lifestyle and that the whole of Creation is dependent on our actions?

All: Our atmosphere is being polluted as the greenhouse effect traps life-threatening heat and poisonous gases. Our water is being contaminated as levels of toxic waste increase. Our mature forests and other natural ecosystems diminish through excessive harvest.

Leader: Our natural resources have become depleted, abused, or misused through our selfishness, our ignorance, our indifference, or our greed.

All: Likewise, our spiritual well-being is being eroded because we lack concern for Creation. Challenge us this day, O God and Creator, and help us change our desire for convenience and comfort into greater concern for the whole of Creation that we and all the creatures call our home, our community, our environment.

Leader: Creator Lord, help us develop a new vision and commitment to faithful stewardship of Creation.

All: That we may become caring and sharing stewards, trustees, and servants of the Creation you have provided for us.

Leader: That we might seek new ways to renew, restore, reuse, recycle and reduce consumption of the resources found in all of Creation.

All: We ask for your blessing and guidance as we carry out new stewardship efforts, so that they might become an impetus for others to help care for Creation and that we ourselves ultimately gain salvation with you our God and Creator in heaven.

Leader: May the examples and actions we carry forth from this day be a faithful witness to this generation and those yet to come.

All: O God and Creator, let us now recognize that our redemption is not just between you and humankind, but extends to all of creation.

Amen.

—Adapted from "Litany for the Creation" by Ed Hauser, which is used at Ecosabbath Services at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Asheville, NC

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