

Youth Retreat: Writing a Life Story of Creation Care

Due to the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic, we cannot all gather together for our typical Youth Retreat at Silver Lake Mennonite Camp. However, we are still committed to finding ways to connect with others, learn, pray and care for creation.

Below is a 'retreat' that can be done individually by youth or with a youth group. All the content can be downloaded or printed so it can be done entirely outside. If you choose to do these outdoor activities with others, they are designed to ensure physical distancing can occur. The full 'retreat' will take approximately 2 to 3 hours.

Depending on your space, technology, and attention span you may choose to do the videos all at once and then the activities or alternate back and forth.

If you have any questions or feedback please reach out to Katie Goerzen-Sheard, Interim Coordinator of Youth Events, at kgoerzensheard@mccc.ca.

Opening Prayer: Home

Mother Earth,
You are our home
Nest, burrow, hollow log, web, reef, den...
Condo, farmhouse, shack, mansion...
You shelter us,
Water us,
Provide for us,
Sustain us, and
Hold us in your care.
May we, in loving turn,
Hold you and touch you with tenderness.
May we tread lightly,
Respectfully,
With awe.
We celebrate and give thanks,
We lament and ask forgiveness.
We rise up as actors and advocates
Voices for the voiceless,
As homes and habitats sit on the brink,
As temperature rises,
And plastic chokes.
You are our one precious home.
Help us clean up our act.
Amen

- Written by Wendy Janzen for World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, September 1, which kicks off the Season of Creation for many liturgical churches around the world.

<https://burningbushforestchurch.weebly.com/reflections--prayers>

Retreat Journal

This retreat focuses on creation care and asks us to reflect on 2 big questions. *How can we write a life story that reflects and reinforces a connection to creation? How can we use our lives to build a more sustainable foundation for the future?*

As you watch the videos, do the activities, and talk with others you can journal your thoughts, questions and prayers. There is a journal pdf provided or use scrap paper or your own journal.

Video Teachings: Writing our Life Story

~by Scott Morton Ninomiya

Section 1 Discussion/ Reflection Questions:

- Scott lives in Kitchener-Waterloo Region and shares about the land he belongs to, the Grand River watershed. What land do you belong to? What is its history? What are the important habitats and ecosystems where you live?
- How do we come to love someone/something? How can we practice loving creation?

Section 2 Discussion/ Reflection Questions:

- How can you integrate creation care..
 - in daily routines?
 - in school?
 - in worship?
 - in the community?
 - in your personal life?

Section 3 Discussion/ Reflection Questions:

- What role can the church play in working for climate justice? What can you do to help the church do this?
- What could you do to step up and take action?
- Who can you connect with to work together?

Activity 1: Web of Life Connection

Sometimes in our busy lives we can forget about all our relations, just how deeply connected we are to creation. This activity helps us to see how intertwined and interconnected all of creation is.

Instructions:

Stand in a wide circle (2 meters from the person on either side of you). One person will start with the **ball of yarn**. They will name a part of creation (creature, plant, habitat, element etc.) and then pass the ball of yarn across the circle to another person, holding on to the end of the yarn. The person who you passed the ball of yarn will then name a part of creation that is somehow connected to the part of creation just said (think about obvious and more complex, less obvious connections). They will then pass the ball of yarn across the circle to someone else, again holding on to a piece of the yarn. Continue passing the ball of yarn across the circle, naming connected parts of creation and making sure to hold on to a section of yarn before passing it along.

After a few times through everyone in the circle you will have a web held up between all of you. Look at the complex web of life made up of so many connections between various parts of creation. Think about how much larger and complex this web is in real life. Ask one person to drop one of the pieces of yarn they are holding. Then ask another person, and another. Imagine if some of these strings were fully cut.

Alternate Instructions for Individuals:

If you are doing this on your own or just one other person, draw out a web of life similar to a 'mind-map'. Start with one part of creation (creature, plant, habitat, element etc.) and then draw a line to another part of creation that is somehow connected (think about obvious and more complex, less obvious connections). Keep going, naming and connecting parts of creation. Feel free to get creative with it. Draw pictures, collage, or do it on a computer.

Discussion and Reflection Questions:

- What happens to the web of life when parts of creation (habitats, animals, plants etc.) are lost or damaged? What are some examples in real life of parts of creation that are being lost or damaged?
- Was it difficult to think of connections? What were some of the types of connections between parts of creation that you came up with?
- What does it mean to be part of the web of God's creation? What is our responsibility to all the parts of creation we are so deeply connected with?

Litany of Lament:

Christ, our Wounded Healer, who suffers the pains of creation, we bring to you our prayers of lament for the Earth. In your mercy, receive our prayers as we name the species of our province that are threatened, endangered or extirpated:

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison

Christ, our Wounded Healer, who suffers the pains of creation, we bring before you our laments as we name other environmental concerns we carry:

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison

Christ, our Wounded Healer, who suffers the pains of creation, we hold before you other griefs and laments that are on our hearts today:

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison

Christ, our Wounded Healer, who suffers the pains of creation, Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, have mercy on us. In your kindness and love, you have entrusted us as caretakers for your Creation, to live as your image-bearers in a world you created for your delight. We confess that we have turned from your will, often abusing the natural world for greedy and short-sighted purposes. Now we are facing global climate disruption and other ecological crises as a result of our rebellion. Forgive us of our sins, and the sins of our society, and our failure to care for what you created for good. In your mercy, lead us to repentance, compassion, and life. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

I have set before you life and death . . . therefore choose life. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Partial list of species who are threatened, endangered, or extirpated in the province of Ontario:

- Eastern Tiger Salamander, Extirpated
 - Fowlers Toad, Endangered
 - Barn Owl, Endangered
 - Golden Eagle, Endangered
 - Greater Prairie Chicken, Extirpated
 - Lake Sturgeon, Endangered
 - Paddlefish, Extirpated
 - Rusty-Patched Bumble Bee, Endangered
 - Karner Blue Moth, Extirpated
 - Mountain Lion (Cougar), Endangered
 - American Badger, Endangered
 - American Chestnut, Endangered
 - Small White Lady's Slipper, Endangered
 - Spring Blue-Eyed Mary Extirpated
 - Four-Leaved Milkweed, Endangered
 - Blue Racer Snake, Endangered
 - Eastern Box Turtle, Extirpated
 - Spotted Turtle, Endangered
 - Timber Rattlesnake, Extirpated
 - Incurved Grizzled Moss, Extirpated
 - Pale-Bellied Frost Lichen, Endangered
 - Piping Plover, Endangered
 - Grey Fox, Threatened
 - Butternut Tree, Endangered
 - Eastern Flowering Dogwood, Endangered
 - Common Five-Lined Skink, Endangered
 - Algonquin Wolf, Threatened
- and more...

- Wendy Janzen <https://burningbushforestchurch.weebly.com/reflections--prayers/previous/2>

Activity 2: God's Creation Walk

This walk will take us through the creation story asking us to pause at various points along our walk and give thanks for each part of creation. We ask you to pause by some sort of water, vegetation, tree, and animal. Think about a route that may take you by each of those things. Hint: they are all around, even in a city. This walk can be as long or as short as you would like.

Beginning of Walk

Begin by finding a comfortable standing position and close your eyes. Imagine a nothingness, a formless void.

Genesis 1:1-5 NRSV

1 In the beginning when God created[a] the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God[b] swept over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Open your eyes. See the light. Take a moment to share gratitude for the light of the day that allows our sight for this walk as well as for the dark nights for our sleep.

What can we learn from the light and the dark of the day and the night?

By Water

As you walk, look for water; a river, pond, or small puddle. Pause next to it. Reach your hand in and feel the glorious water.

Genesis 1:6-8 NRSV

6 And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." 7 So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. 8 God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

Take a drink of water from a water bottle if you have one. Give thanks for all types of water that quench our thirst, provide life, and are full of beauty and strength. Thanks be for the rain, the rivers, the lakes, the oceans, the puddles, the glaciers, the groundwater, and waters of all forms.

What is God teaching us through the water of the earth?

On Land by Vegetation

Pause along your path by a bit of vegetation. Perhaps a berry bush, walnut tree, farmer's field, grass, mushrooms, etc. If you have a snack, eat it. Or try a piece of cedar leaf. Say thank you and only take a little. *Don't eat anything unless you know it is edible.

Genesis 1:9-13 NRSV

9 And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

As you chew, voice gratitude for the land we stand on and the vegetation that grows from it. Appreciate food that sustains us and the fertile land that provides.

How can the vegetation of the earth connect us to God?

By a Tree Losing its Leaves

Pause somewhere where you can see bare trees with fallen leaves on the ground. Stand in awe of the beauty of the changing season.

Genesis 1:14-19 NRSV

14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. 16 God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17 God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

Share in gratitude for the sun that lights and heats our days giving us so much energy and life. Say thank you to the stars and moon for lighting up the night sky. Give thanks for the seasons that change and remind us to be present and grateful for each moment in time.

How is God's presence seen in the changing seasons?

By an Animal

Walk quietly, treading lightly. Pause by an animal or a sign of one. Some birds, a squirrel, a pet dog. If you don't notice any, try stopping and being very still and quiet. Who shows up?

Genesis 1:20-25 NRSV

20 And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." 21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." 23 And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals of the

earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Take a moment and be grateful for the other animals we share our home with. Thanks be to all the other animal life on this earth who have so much to teach us. We are grateful for the sustenance they provide as well as for their very existence.

How can we see the image of God in the animals around us?

In an Open Space

Find an open space, perhaps back where you started or where you would like to end up for the next activity. If you are with others (who are 2 meters away and may be wearing a mask), look around at them. Place a hand on your heart and feel your heartbeat.

Genesis 1:26-31 The Message

26-28 God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature

So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,

the birds in the air, the cattle,

And, yes, Earth itself,

and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."

God created human beings;

he created them godlike,

Reflecting God's nature.

He created them male and female.

God blessed them:

"Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!

Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,

for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth."

29-30 Then God said, "I've given you

every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth

And every kind of fruit-bearing tree,

given them to you for food.

To all animals and all birds,

everything that moves and breathes,

I give whatever grows out of the ground for food."

And there it was.

31 God looked over everything he had made;

it was so good, so very good!

It was evening, it was morning—

Day Six.

Give gratitude for the life we have. For every breath. For the life and breath of each other. Thanks be for all of creation! Now let us take on the responsibility we have been given and take care of creation so that the earth may continue to care for every part of creation, including us.

Activity 3: Sensio Divina with Trees

Lectio Divina is a traditional spiritual practice for reading and meditating on scriptures, with the intention to increase connection with God and God's word. Sensio Divina is described by Bruce Stanly from http://www.mysticchrist.co.uk/blog/post/sensio_divina as meaning "literally 'Divine sensing', a contemplative meditation to connect and dialogue with Divine presence in a place, object or natural phenomenon (Jer 23:24) and come to a deeper understanding of God through nature (Rom 1:20)."

Trees are all around us and a very tangible connection to the breath of life. This spiritual practice can help us use our breath and the trees around us to connect with God and God's creation. These are the 5 steps in the Sensio Divina with Trees spiritual practice. Find a space by a tree or two to go through these steps.

Preparation:

Find a place where you can quietly contemplate the trees. Sit so that you are comfortable, shifting your body so you are relaxed and open. Take some time to settle into quiet. With your in-breath breathe in awareness of the presence of God; with the out-breath, breathe out all that keeps you from being fully present.

Noticing:

Shift your awareness to the trees in front of you. Notice the aspect of the trees that invites you or stirs you in this time of prayer. It may be a colour, a smell, a sound, a particular tree or a particular part of a tree. Notice the way that the Holy Spirit might be calling you to deeper attention through trees today. Use your senses to get to know the trees. Listen until you have a sense for which aspect of trees is inviting you, and spend time savouring it.

Reflecting:

Continue to savour this aspect of trees, and begin to allow it to unfold in your imagination and/or memory to speak to you more deeply. Notice what feelings, thoughts or memories arise for you. Allow God to expand your ability to listen and to open you to a fuller awareness of the role and place of trees on this earth.

Begin to notice where these qualities touch or mirror your life. What is evoked in you? Allow it to interact with your thoughts, hopes, memories, desires. Rest in this awareness.

Responding:

After a time of resting in what the trees evoke in you, you may be moved to deeper insight and a desire to respond to God. When this comes, attend to the way your reflection on trees connects with the context and situation of your life right now. Take time exploring this connection. How is God present to you there? Is God calling you to anything in your present circumstances? Is there a challenge presented here? Address your response to God in whatever way seems appropriate.

Resting:

Finally, simply rest in the presence of the One who has spoken to you intimately and personally through the gifts and life of trees. Rest in the silence of God's loving embrace, and allow your heart to be moved to gratitude for this time. Allow yourself to simply be in God's rooted presence.

When you are ready, slowly return to awareness of the world around you.

Closing Prayer: We Hold all Creation in Our Hearts

We hold in our hearts our siblings who suffer from storms, droughts, wildfires, and famines intensified by climate change.

We hold in our hearts all species that suffer. We grieve their loss of habitat and the loss of species already extinct.

We hold in our hearts the world leaders delegated to make decisions for life.

We pray that the web of life may be mended through courageous actions to limit carbon emissions, fossil fuel extraction, plastic pollution, and other harmful activities.

We pray for right actions for adaptation and mitigation to help our already suffering earth community.

We pray that love and wisdom might inspire my actions and our actions as communities. . . so that we may, with integrity, look into the eyes of fellow humans and all beings and truthfully say, we are doing our part to write a life story that cares for them and the future of all of creation.

May love transform us and our world with new steps toward life. -Amen.

~adapted from Interfaith Climate Prayer <https://www.faithclimateactionweek.org/prayers-and-climate-blessings/>