

Note: please feel free to use or adapt this resource in any way that works for your own setting. Simply credit David R. Weiss (www.davidrweiss.com).

BACKGROUND

This Sacred Circle service was a spontaneous outgrowth of a book study using *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're In without Going Crazy* by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (New World Library, 2012; www.activehope.info). The book presents a practical way to process thoughts and feelings about the threat posed by climate change. It is especially powerful when read as a group. We found it transformational.

We did the book study over the summer of 2019. As we were completing the study, the Global Youth Climate Strike of September 2019 was on the horizon so we chose to plan a contemplative service for the evening of the same day as the strike. This was both to be in solidarity with the youth (who were inviting adults to join them in daytime strikes, marches, etc.) and also to offer a quieter and more spiritual opportunity at the end of the workday.

However, *this service is NOT specific to the Global Youth Climate Strike*. Although it reflects the rising voices of youth around climate—a theme hardly limited to the September 2019 Strike—the service is shaped much more directly by the themes in *Active Hope* which express Joanna Macy's "Work That Reconnects" philosophy of personal and communal empowerment. In that sense, this service can provide a powerful moment of spiritual reflection at any point during the year.

Active Hope is not a Christian book, but it is certainly spirit-friendly. Because the climate crisis is such a looming human threat, we were committed to creating a liturgy that, while reverent and prayerful, was also expansive and inclusive so that persons of many faiths would feel comfortable.

The Work That Reconnects (the "philosophy" underpinning Active Hope) is grounded in four "movements": coming from gratitude, honoring the world's pain, seeing with new eyes, and going forth. The book explores each theme at some length. Our liturgy reflects them, although for time's sake we combined the last two movements in our third section. Our purpose was not to "teach" the book, but to trust its wisdom and honor the power of our experience in using it together.

Finally, although I wrote the liturgy itself, the service as a whole—and the energy to make it a reality—is thanks to all the members of the Active Hope Book Group at St. Paul's UCC in St. Paul, Minnesota: Deb George, Kate Hansen, Tracy Kugler, Donna Olson, Tracie Olson Payne, Bruce Tyler, and myself, David Weiss.

NOTES ON THE SERVICE

[These notes will help you see how we intended to use the liturgy, but please feel free to adapt it in ways that best suit your setting.]

The liturgy as written should fit comfortably within one hour or a little less.

We planned ours for outdoors, with the hope to arrange chairs in a circle, with four aisles marking out four sections of seating. In event of rain, we'd need to move indoors and use a sanctuary with fixed pews. In that case our "circle" would become more metaphor.

We used the imagery of Four Element (Water, Earth, Air, Fire) as a simple way to embrace the whole of creation. These were signified by the four seating sections and by four poles with colored streamers to denote each element. The ribbons that people were invited to write phrases on (using Sharpie markers) were 1-inch wide and in colors to complement the streamers. Our plan is to weave the ribbons onto the streamers and be able to use these as liturgical pieces in future creation/climate liturgies.

We intentionally kept the service sparse. Given the somber theme of climate crisis, it has almost a Holy Week tone to it.

Our opening "contemplative" music was simply a CD that featured bird and nature sounds. Any music that is quiet, contemplative, "natural" would work.

I've included one of the two songs we used in the text below—because it comes from a website that offers free permission to reprint and use in worship settings. Our second song was "It's About Time" by John Denver. However, I wrote three fresh climate-based verses to

go with his refrain. While we felt comfortable using that in our immediate setting, there would be copyright issues involved in sharing the blended text elsewhere in print. But there is a growing library of good creation/climate songs out there, and many hymnals have songs that would be suitable. (You'll simply want one that gives voice to the rising resolve at this point in the liturgy.)

One possibility is "[God's Wisdom Calls to Us](#)", written by me. Another source Norman Habel's [Songs for Celebrating Creation](#) (the source for our first song). And another is this website, [Season of Creation](#). There are many more.

This is a link to background on the cello piece, "[A Song for our Warming Planet](#)," including an option to download the sheet music. There are undoubtedly other short interludes that would work effectively.

The liturgy, as written, uses one leader and four additional readers as leading voices. That number could easily increase or decrease. Multiple voices are most important in the third-final section, as the quick shifts from one voice to the next help build the energy back up.

We kept our time of hospitality simple and sparse as well. We offered apples donated by a local apple orchard and day-old (but very nice!) bread donated by a local bakery. It was seasonal, simple, and somberly festive.

Questions? Comments? Feel free to contact me at drw59mn@gmail.com or visit my [website](#), where I blog regularly at the intersection of Faith and Climate.

~David Weiss



Honoring the Global Climate Strike

WELCOME! We're glad you've come. We offer this as an opportunity for personal-communal reflection-prayer following the Youth Climate March earlier today. This is sacred space for gratitude, grief, and hope through stillness, words, and song. *We are grateful you're here.*

GATHERING WITHIN OURSELVES (10-15 minutes of contemplative time)

As you enter the circle and find a seat, allow yourself to settle in—both to this space and to your Self. Let the music bring you into touch with nature. The aisles mark the four cardinal directions; the four sections of chairs echo the four ancient elements: water, earth, air, and fire. By this symbolism we mean to embrace the whole of creation in this Sacred Circle.

We invite you to use this quiet time to listen to your own heart. In the face of global climate crisis what grief do *you* carry? What fears do *you* harbor? What hopes do *you* hold—confidently or desperately? We find our strength in authenticity. May this gathering time be space where your deepest truths can emerge.

BRINGING OUR TRUTH FORWARD

An invitation to bear witness to your grief, fear, or hope by writing a word or phrase onto a ribbon for one of our four element streamers.

WELCOME

Welcome & Introduction to the Sacred Circle by a member of the planning team

COMING FROM GRATITUDE

One: Whatever we must face—and as this climate crisis deepens there is SO MUCH we must face—whatever we must face, we will face it with more grace and more steady determination if we come from gratitude.

Gratitude for Water:

Rdr 1: In our tradition, God, whom we see as the spark of creation for the cosmos, moved over the waters, imagining all that might be. And in Christian baptism—as well as many other faith traditions—water carries the promise of cleansing, renewal, and new life ...

ALL: Water is also precious in our daily lives: from the rain that nourishes the ground so that it might provide food, to the water that refreshes us, bathes us, and fills our bodies, to the soothing sound of waves on the beach, rain on leaves, or a stream over rocks ...

Rdr 1: For these watery things and more ...

ALL: We say Thank You.

Gratitude for Earth:

Rdr 2: Judeo-Christian scripture tells us we were birthed from Earth itself: humus filled with holy breath and made humus beings. It tells us, too, that Earth is home to *all* creatures, hinting at the kinship we share with all ...

ALL: Earth, too, is precious in our daily lives: from the ground that holds us, to the fields that feed us, to the grandeur of mountain peaks and the subtler beauty of rolling hills ...

Rdr 2: For these earthy things and more ...

ALL: We say Thank You.

Gratitude for Air:

Rdr 3: We call God Spirit, a Holy Wind, named in countless ways by people across time and place. Wind itself hints at this unseen sacred energy swirling in our midst. Indeed wrapping this fragile planet in an atmosphere, invisible but essential to foster and sustain life ...

ALL: Air is precious as well in our daily lives: as the breath that fills our lungs—again and again and again. But also as the *same breath* that moves between *all that lives*, joining us to a vast community of persons, animals, and plants ...

Rdr 3: For these airy things and more ...

ALL: We say Thank You.

Gratitude for Fire:

Rdr 4: We imagine a blazing God, the sacred energy of the Big Bang, creating all the elements in the womb of that cosmic fire. Fire became the symbol for the Christian Pentecost, as tongues of flame danced on disciples' heads, announcing that God's love danced to all corners of the world ...

ALL: Fire is also precious in our daily lives, providing the warmth we need and the energy that helps us work. Fire especially rises up in our longing for justice—seen today in the lives ... the voices ... the fiery feet of youth striking and marching across this globe ...

Rdr 4: For these fiery things and more ...

ALL: We say Thank You.

Song: I'm an Earth Being (Tune: Morning Has Broken)

Born of this planet, I'm an Earth being,
Born of this planet, I'm an Earth child.
One with all beings, born of this planet,
I'm an Earth being, one with the wild.

Born of this planet, baptized with moisture,
I'm an Earth being, blessed by her rains;
Rising from oceans, flowing through rivers,
Earth's sacred waters pulse through my veins.

Born of this planet, flowing with breezes,
Children inhale Earth's infinite breath;
Earth's holy breathing enters my body,
Creating a presence deeper than death.

Born of this planet, one speck of stardust,
We feel the pulsing deep in our soul,
Mystr'y like music throbs in the landscape,
Earth like a mother, makes our lives whole.

Words by Norman Habel (see credits)

HONORING THE PAIN OF THE WORLD

One: However much we might prefer to rush forward into action—or however much we might feel paralyzed by despair—there is power that comes from honoring the truth, the depth of Earth’s pain. As we pause to do so—we begin the healing needed in this moment. Such pain might easily overwhelm us as individuals, but in this circle, if only briefly, we can bear it ... together.

ALL: So we honor the pain of the Water ...

Rdr 1: We remember ice caps that melt, and the oceans that warm, becoming less hospitable to life. We lament the water that roils in hurricanes, overwhelms in floods, and rises along coastlines ...

ALL: So we honor the pain of the Earth ...

Rdr 2: We recall Earth’s surface temperatures that rise unrelentingly, the loss of life-giving top soil, and the mass extinctions of plants, animals, and even insects, as Earth’s capacity to be home to life is fractured ...

ALL: So we honor the pain of the Air ...

Rdr 3: We remember the emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses that make our atmosphere betray its own life-sustaining properties. We lament that our heating planet creates conflict between and within nations, such that despite our common breath, we seem to breathe fear and hatred instead ...

ALL: So we honor the pain of Fire ...

Rdr 4: We recall the wildfires that destroy both forest and communities. We lament the wanton burning of rainforests. And we grieve for the truth spoken by our youth, that Planet Earth, *our very home* is on fire.

One: We have named only a fraction of the pain unleashed by global heating. But for tonight it is enough. Now we invite you to sit with this pain for another moment as you listen to this haunting musical composition. Mostly we visualize climate change in charts and graphs, but this cello piece, “A Song of our Warming Planet” puts it to music. The tones you’ll hear follow the rise in Earth’s temperature from 1880 to 2012. In just two minutes time, as the notes rise higher and higher, you are *hearing* the rising pain of Water, Earth, Air, and Fire. Listen.

Cello: A Song of Our Warming Planet

arranged by Daniel Crawford with Scott St. George (see credits)

SEEING WITH NEW EYES AND GOING FORTH

One: The stakes have never been higher. For us, for our children and grandchildren, for Earth itself.

Rdr 1: Like it or not, we *WERE* born for *THIS* moment, because *we are the ones here. Now.*

Rdr 2: And since we are, let’s embrace this moment *as an adventure* ...

Rdr 3: ... as our moment to rise ...

Rdr 4: ... not because we’re so confident ...

One: ... but because we’re so needed—here. Now.

ALL: Let us remember: not one of us in this circle is alone. Each of us is linked to others. And to Earth. Connected, interwoven.

Rdr 1: And together, we rise.

Rdr 2: We may not see the way forward very far ...

Rdr 3: ... but we saw the way here tonight ... one step at a time ...

Rdr 4: ... and we can ... keep ... moving ... one step at a time ...

ALL: ... as together, we rise.

One: Let's remember: countless generations brought us to this day. Alongside the foolhardy choices, habits, policies, and opinions that created the climate crisis, there have been countless actions for hope and compassion, wisdom and love, by so many.

Rdr 1: And we choose to stand on their shoulders ...

Rdr 2: ... to honor their lives with our own ...

ALL: As together, across time, we rise.

One: *This* is the work of Active Hope. We begin in gratitude. We acknowledge deep pain. We *feel* our ability to rise. Together. And we go forth in action.

Rdr 3: Inspired by those who have struggled so long before us ...

Rdr 4: ... and by the youth who marched here and around the world today,

ALL: We pledge to take up our places ...

One: ... to do what we can to address the climate crisis:

ALL: By taking actions in our own lives ...

Rdr 1: ... by building community ...

Rdr 2: ... by pressing our political leaders ...

Rdr 3: ... by challenging the way things are ...

ALL: And doing all these things as though our lives depend on it ...

Rdr 4: ... because they do.

One: Here is the promise of Active Hope. Known also as "the work that reconnects," Active Hope echoes that truth found in every great faith tradition: that in seeking the well-being of others ...

Rdr 1: ... we find the deepest joy ...

Rdr 2: ... the greatest hope ...

Rdr 3: ... the highest sense of purpose ...

Rdr 4: ... and the richest human life ...

ALL: As together we rise.

Song: (any song that confirms resolve to action will work)

We used an adaptation of John Denver's "It's About Time," but cannot share that in print because of copyright issues with Denver's lyrics. See the service notes for additional ideas.

SENDING

One: We want to send you forth with fresh conviction about the world's value and beauty. With deepened awareness of the world's pain. And with a renewed sense of our place *together* in this moment. We invite you to join us as you feel able in reciting Joanna Macy's "Five Vows" as ways of guiding the energy we bring to the world and each other each day.

ALL: I vow to myself and to each of you—

To commit myself daily to the healing of our world and the welfare of all beings.

To live on Earth more lightly and less violently in the food, products, and energy I consume.

To draw strength and guidance from the living Earth, the ancestors, the future beings, and our siblings of all species.

To support each of you in your work for the world, and to ask for help when I need it.

To pursue a daily spiritual practice that clarifies my mind, strengthens my heart, and supports me in observing these vows.

One: As we end our Sacred Circle, we invite you to share a sign of peace and hope with one another, by a handshake, a smile, or a hug. And we warmly invite you to stay for some apples ... bread ... fellowship ... and to sign a climate petition for people of faith. Thank you for being here tonight. Go with gratitude, grief, hope, and peace. For together we rise. Amen.

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SACRED CIRCLE SERVICE CREDITS

Sacred Circle for Our Climate conceived, created, and organized by the Active Hope Book Group at St. Paul's UCC, St. Paul, MN: Deb George, Kate Hansen, Tracy Kugler, Donna Olson, Tracie Olson Payne, Bruce Tyler, and David Weiss

Liturgy for our Sacred Circle – written by David Weiss

Music during gathering time – “Bird Songs of the Northwoods” featuring birds of MN, WI, MI, NY, VT, NH, ME, MA, CT, RI. © 2005 Stan Tekiela (www.adventurepublications.net).

I'm an Earth Being – words by Norman Habel © 2010 (www.seasonofcreation.com/creation-songs); tune – Bunessan (Scottish traditional/Morning has Broken); guitar by Deb George.

Song of Our Warming Planet – arranged by Daniel Crawford in collaboration with Scott St. George (www.vimeo.com/69122809).

The Five Vows come from *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're In without Going Crazy* by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (New World Library, 2012), pp. 202-203.

ABOUT THE CLIMATE STRIKE AND OUR SACRED CIRCLE

In August 2018 Greta Thunberg began her now famous series of climate school strike vigils outside the Swedish Parliament. By November 2018 Greta's small act of defiant witness has birthed a series of worldwide “Fridays for the Future” school strikes. Youth around the globe began to organize actions to raise awareness about the climate crisis and to press for the type of sweeping and dramatic political action necessary to avert the worst consequences of climate change. Today's Global Youth Climate Strike (9/20/2019) is the culmination of months of organizing to link a series of Youth Climate Strikes together across the globe on a single day, and invite adults to join in solidarity, as a united cry for action.

The Youth Climate Strike initiates a week (September 20-27) of climate-focused action. It is timed to precede the UN Youth Summit on Climate (9/21-22) and the UN Climate Action Summit (9/23), both in New York and leading off a week of UN meetings with important implications for climate. Additionally, Friday (9/27) has been identified by Earth Strike as a second day of global strike for climate action. Thus, *any day* from September 20-27 is a good day to pause for reflection-prayer around climate.

This Sacred Circle service was developed as a spontaneous outgrowth of our desire to take a first concrete step after reading *Active Hope** together over the summer. The book presents a practical way to process our thoughts and feelings about the threat posed by climate change. It is especially powerful when read as a group. We found it transformational.

~ St. Paul's UCC Active Hope Book Group.

**Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're In without Going Crazy* by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (New World Library, 2012; www.activehope.info).

Learn about the United Church of Christ's work on environmental and climate justice here: www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries; and here: www.uccmn.org/resources/creation-justice.