

Prayer for Creation:
An Urgent Call to
Save Our Planet
By Susan Searle

Purpose

This session is designed to be held outdoors in God's creation. Youth will look at areas of concern for our planet while celebrating the mystery of creation. This session uses a variety of sensory activities as well as creation stories from Psalms in the Bible. The session ends with an interactive prayer meditation using symbols representing the creation story found in the book of Genesis. There are also many suggestions to extend the session.

Session at a Glance

7:00 p.m. Welcome
7:05 p.m. Icebreaker: Protecting Creation is our Responsibility
7:15 p.m. Save the Planet Trivia Game
7:30 p.m. Sitting Under a Tree
7:45 p.m. Creation Stories using the Psalms
8:05 p.m. Closing Prayer: Symbols of Creation
8:20 p.m. Announcements and Refreshments
Extend the Session: Creation Stories (add 30-60 minutes)
8:30 p.m. Good Night!

Extend the Session: Creation Stories (add 30-60 minutes)

If possible, ask a volunteer to start a campfire, where you can have roasted marshmallows and drinks. Read creation stories from around the globe.

Extend the Session: Movies (add 90 minutes to 2 hours)

Watch a movie with a creation and/or environment theme. Suggestions include:

Evan Almighty (Universal Studios, rated PG, 2007, 96 minutes)

Brother Sun, Sister Moon: The Story of St. Francis (Paramount, rated PG, 2004, 121 minutes)

An Inconvenient Truth (Paramount, rated PG, 2006, 96 minutes)

March of the Penguins (Warner Home Video, rated G, 2005, 80 minutes)

Note to Leader: If you decide to show an entire movie, contact the Motion Picture Licensing Corporation (www.mplc.com) about getting licensed. The website has very good information about the need for a license to show movies (whether you charge admission or not, whether a non-profit or for-profit organization). Showing an entire movie is considered a public showing, outside the definition of 'home use only' that we see on the screen at the start of a movie.

Extend the Session: Nature Walk (add 15-30 minutes)

Depending on the setting for your session, take youth on a nature walk or hike in a wilderness area.

Have youth find objects in nature and then create their own “creation stories” about the objects. (For example: “This rock was created billions of years ago by sand and water....”).

Extend the Session: Saving the Planet

Suggest that youth search the web and MySpace for organizations that promote saving the planet. Compile a “going green” checklist and distribute to the young people.

Materials Needed

- Blue and/or green balloons (8 or 9 inch), one per small group of 8-10
- Bibles, one per small group of four
- Clay pot, some flower seeds, potting soil, and a hand shovel
- “Bubbles,” one for each prayer assistant (two or three, see #3 in Prepare in Advance)
- Small, stuffed animals that look like real animals (not Mickey Mouse), four or five is enough
- Snack or lunch sacks filled with 3 tablespoons of sand each, one for each participant
- Tealights, one for each participant
- Matches or a lightstick
- Basket or bowl to draw trivia questions
- Clear bowl filled with water, one for each prayer assistant (two or three, see #3 in Prepare in Advance)
- Resource 1, Save the Planet Trivia Game (see #2 in Prepare in Advance)
- Resource 2, Save the Planet Trivia Game—Answers, one copy for leader
- Resource 3, Book of Psalms Scripture Passages, cut apart into slips of paper, one for each small group
- Resource 4, Closing Prayer, five to six copies (see #3 in Prepare in Advance)
- Handout 1, Sitting Under a Tree, one for each participant
- Pens or pencils, one for each participant

Prepare in Advance

Note to Leader: Ideally, this session would take place in an outdoor, park like setting. Before the session check out different locations to determine the best place to hold your session. Find the quietest place with as little traffic noise as possible. Look for a location that is easy for participants to find and one that would be “safe” to use in the early evening. If there is not a possibility of a nearby outdoor location bring as much of the outdoors inside as part of your environment for this session (example: plants, rocks, a fountain, etc.).

1. Fill blue and/or green balloons with water and store in a plastic container or tub.
2. Make a copy of Resource 1, Save the Planet Trivia Game, and cut and fold questions for game.
3. Invite young people to help with prayer. In addition to yourself as the prayer leader, you will need two young people to be readers and two or three young people to be the prayer assistants for the closing prayer. Meet with the prayer readers and assistants

prior to the session, using Resource 4, Closing Prayer, to review and practice their roles.

4. Set up the prayer focus. Cover a table with a cloth. Place a Bible, a cross or crucifix, and pillar candle on the table. The table will need to be large enough to hold a 'creation symbol' from each of the small groups, in addition to the items placed there by the prayer assistants during the closing prayer.

5. Set up tables for refreshments (if you are serving any) and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and name tags. (Skip the name tags if participants know each other and you know them. However, if they wear nametags, you wear one, too.) Hospitality is important: As the facilitator, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.

Session Outline

Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)

Welcome the participants. Introduce yourself and any other leaders present. If new people are attending, be sure to allow time for everyone to introduce themselves. Provide a brief overview of tonight's session.

Ice Breaker Activity: Protecting Creation is Our Responsibility (10 minutes)

Note to Leader: This game requires a large open space, preferably outside.

Divide the youth into teams of about eight to ten participants. If teams are not of equal size, then during the game some participants may need to go twice. In small groups, ask participants to name some of the immediate concerns that are threatening God's creation today (i.e., global warming, world hunger, consumerism, greed, etc.). After three to five minutes, invite each group to share aloud a few ideas. Then say:

In the book of Genesis, God created the entire world and said it was good. In Genesis, God also bestows on humanity the awesome task of caring for all of creation. Tonight, you will have an opportunity to hold the world in your hands (hold up a water balloon).

It will be your responsibility as a team to carefully pass the "earth" on to the next generation. In order to accomplish this, I would like for you to split your small group in half, two lines facing each other. There should be about a three foot distance between each side of your team. We will be tossing the "earth" back and forth between your team members. If your team drops the "earth" and it explodes, then your team is out. Please sit down if your team is out.

When all the small groups are in their lines and ready to play, say:

In the Gospel of John it says that "God so loved the world."

Hand a water balloon to the person in the middle (right side) of each team's line. If you have many teams, get an adult volunteer to help distribute the water balloons.

In the Book of Hosea (4:1-3) it is written that ‘God has a grievance against the inhabitants of the land: There is no fidelity, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land’ (v. 1). Therefore, the people have separated away from God. So, each side of your team must take two steps back and then the person holding the “earth” (balloon) tosses it to the team member across from him or her. (After tossing the balloon, the person goes to the back of his or her line)

According to Hosea, ‘Because of swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery, bloodshed follows bloodshed’ (v. 2) Therefore we are further separated from God. Therefore, the left side of each team must take four steps backwards. The person in front must then toss the “earth” to the other side.

Because the people have forgotten about God, the land mourns (v. 3). Therefore, the right side of your team must take one giant step back then toss the “earth.”

Because we are not in fidelity with God, all the beasts of the field will perish (v. 3). Thus, the left side will take three steps backwards and then toss the “earth.”

Because we do not imitate God’s mercy, all the birds in the air will perish (v. 3). Because of this the right side will take one step backwards and then toss the “earth” to the team member across from them.

Because we have no knowledge of God, even the fish of the sea will perish (v. 3). So, both sides of your team takes one step back before the team member on the left tosses the “earth.”

“Hear the word of God, O people, for God has grievance against the inhabitants of the land” (v. 1). Therefore, both sides of the team take two steps backwards before the right side tosses the “earth.”

“For there is no fidelity, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land” (v. 1). And because of this the left side of the team takes five steps backwards before tossing the “earth.”

Because God so loved the world, each side of your team may now take seven steps forward before the final toss of the “earth.”

After the game, gather all participants together and discuss their thoughts. Sample questions to use include:

1. What are some ways that the land mourns today?
2. What evidence do we have that the animals of our world are suffering because of us?
3. According to Hosea, why is the earth mourning and the animals dying?
4. What emotions did you have as the “earth” was passed back and forth?
5. How might a balloon being tossed back and forth represent how nobody seems to be taking responsibility for protecting creation?

Save the Planet Trivia Game (15 minutes)

For this next activity participants will stay in their small groups. Tell them the next activity is a trivia game to determine how much they know about the things that threaten God's creation.

Each team will get one guess at an answer, and each person on the team must agree on the answer. Team members may not blurt out answers! If the team gives the wrong answer, the question will be put back into the basket and asked at another time. The team that did not drop the "earth" in the last game draws the first question.

Invite teams, one at a time, to select a question from the basket. After all questions have been answered, or ten minutes, use the following discussion questions:

1. Did any of the questions or answers surprise you? Why or why not?
2. What do you think the term "global village" means?
3. Do you believe that by virtue of creation, everything is interconnected? Why or why not?
4. What do you think is the price we pay for all that we do to the planet and to each other?

Sitting Under a Tree (15 minutes)

Note to Leader: If you are unable to do this activity under a tree, you can have the same discussion by making a giant spider web out of yarn with each participant holding a part of the web.

Invite each small group to find a tree and either sit under it or around it in one large circle. Give each person a copy of Handout 1, Sitting Under a Tree. Ask one person to be a facilitator for their group's discussion.

Creation Stories using the Psalms (20 minutes)

Gather the young people back into one large group.

Most of us know that the story of creation can be found in the book of Genesis in the Bible. Where else in the Bible we can find stories about how God created the earth? (Psalms).

Invite youth to form new groups of no more than four people. Give each group a Bible and one of the following Scripture passages (slip of paper from Resource 3). Give these instructions:

Ask one person in your small group to read the Psalm passage you have been assigned. As a group, discuss how this Psalm passage is relevant to our world today. What might God be saying to us about caring for the world in our present time? After discussing and sharing the Scripture, your group needs to find a natural object that

could symbolically represent your passage (i.e, rock, pinecone, water, etc.). You have 10 minutes for this activity.

When all the groups have completed their tasks, each group will share their Psalm passage, the symbol, and what they think the message is for us today. Let youth know that they will be using their found object in our closing prayer.

Note to Leader: If you have five or fewer small groups, have youth read each Psalm in its entirety (Psalms 33, 65, 104, 147, 148). If you have between 5 and 15 groups, assign each group one of the passages using Resource 3. If you have more than 15 small groups you may need to assign the same passage to more than one group.

Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

Note to Leader: Ask each group to place their found objects in the center of your prayer space. Together they will make one sculpture of God's creation. Gather youth into one large circle around the sculpture for prayer. Ideally, this prayer would take place at dusk or after dark. Begin prayer in the dark (readers use a flashlight if it is too dark). Follow the prayer as outlined in Resource 4, Closing Prayer.

Announcements and Refreshments (10 minutes)

Thank the young people for their participation in tonight's session. Make any necessary announcements, and invite participants to enjoy some refreshments.

Websites mentioned in this session were successfully accessed on February 24, 2008.

Quotes of St. Francis in the closing prayer are from his "The Canticle of Brother Sun." Many versions of this prayer exist on the Internet.

This session was written by [Susan Searle](#), Campus Minister for Western State College, Gunnison, Colorado.

Resource 1

Save the Planet Trivia Game

Directions: Cut along dotted lines, fold, and place in basket to be drawn by teams.

1. How many plastic bottles of water did Americans use in 2006?

a. One million b. 25,000 c. 31 billion

2. How long did it take for 40 million acres of forest to disappear from the world?

- a. one year b. ten years c. 100 years

3. One billion people around the world do not have access to what necessary resource?

- a. livestock b. corn c. safe water

4. What percentage of plastic bottles are recycled in the US?

- a. 90% b. 50% c. 10%

5. What product sold in the United States requires the destruction of 35 million trees a year?

- a. magazines b. furniture c. firewood

6. How many gallons of water are wasted by leaving the tap water running while brushing your teeth?

- a. 10 gallons b. 5 gallons c. 60 gallons

7. What kills 1 million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals each year?

- a. bacteria in water b. the fishing industry c. eating or being strangled by plastic

8. In what country do 13 million children not have enough food to eat?

- a. United States b. Mexico c. Amsterdam

9. How many garbage trucks would it take to hold all the junk mail produced in one year in the U.S?

- a. One million b. 340,000 c. 578

10. Globally, how many people live with chronic hunger?

- a. One billion b. 1,000 c. One million

11. Where can more than 700 man-made toxins be found today?
a. in the oceans b. in the air c. inside the human body

12. What country consumes most of the world's natural resources?
a. China b. Africa c. United States

13. What is the leading cause of death for children worldwide?
a. diarrhea b. AIDS c. malaria

14. How much trash does the average American produce each year?
a. one ton b. 50 pounds c. 600 pounds

15. By the end of the 21st century, 12% of what species will become extinct due to human activities?
a. fish b. birds c. reptiles

16. Why did China's freshwater white dolphin recently become extinct?
a. poachers b. too many sharks c. rapid industrialization

17. What is very likely caused by humans burning fossil fuels?
a. Asian bird flu b. global warming c. contamination of meat

18. What can be found floating in the ocean 1,000 miles off the West Coast?
a. whale sanctuary b. abandoned ships c. an island of trash the size of the state of Texas

19. Plastic has been around for only 50 years. How long does it take for some forms of plastic to fully degrade?

- a. 500 years b. 100,000 years c. 100 years

20. How many people live in the world with HIV/AIDS?

- a. 42 million b. 27 million c. 59 million

21. Who made this statement about our responsibility toward creation? "Today, humanity fears for future ecological equilibrium."

- a. Pope Benedict b. President Bush c. Bono

22. Who is the patron saint of ecology?

- a. St. Patrick b. St. Francis of Assisi c. St. Bonaventure

23. What is the source of this statement? "There is inherent integrity to all of creation and it requires careful stewardship of all our resources."

- a. U.S. Constitution b. UNICEF vision statement c. Catholic Social Teaching

24. What did the U.S. Bishops call the environmental crisis in their statement *Renewing the Earth*?

- a. a sin b. a moral challenge c. a secular concern

25. Where can you find the following statement? "Humankind's dominion over other living beings requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation."

- a. Catechism of the Catholic Church b. Bible c. Catholic lectionary

Questions and answers came from various websites including Catholic Relief Services (www.crs.org), Discovery Channel (<http://dsc.discovery.com/>), The Hunger Site (<http://www.hungersite.org/>)

www.thehungersite.com/clickToGive/home.faces?siteId=1), World Wildlife Fund (www.worldwildlife.org), and The Denver Post (www.Denverpost.com).

Resource 2

Save the Planet Trivia Game—Answers

1. How many plastic bottles of water did Americans use in 2006?
a. One million b. 25,000 c. 31 billion
2. How long did it take for 40 million acres of forest to disappear from the world?
a. one year b. ten years c. 100 years
3. One billion people around the world do not have access to what necessary resource?
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Handout 1

Sitting Under a Tree

Discussion Questions

In your small group, gather under or around a large tree. If possible, sit directly underneath and look up into the tree.

1. Imagine this tree is all of creation.

Which part of the tree would represent God and why?

2. Look closely at the tree.

Are some branches bigger and stronger than others?

Why do you think that is? Do some branches get more sunlight or more water than others? Is that fair? What will happen to the tree if some branches die or break off?

3. Look for new growth in the tree.

What does new growth in a tree, that has obviously lived for many years, tell us about creation?

4. Look for evidence that the tree is reproducing (seeds, fruit, pinecones, etc.).

What can this tree show us about God and about our responsibility to creation?

5. Choose a particular branch that most represents the state of the world today. For example: "I chose this branch because it has many smaller branches growing from it. To me it represents how the stronger countries need to help the smaller ones in our world."

6. How can we become more responsible stewards of the planet in our lifestyle choices, energy consumption, and garbage and recycling practices?

7. How might serving God save our planet?

Resource 3

Book of Psalms Scripture Passages

Directions: Cut apart into slips of paper, one for each small group.

Psalms 33:5-9

Psalms 65:5-8

Psalms 65:9-10

Psalms 65: 11-13

Psalms 104:1-5

Psalms 104:6-13

Psalms 104:14-18

Psalms 104:19-23

Psalms 104:24-26

Psalms 104:27-32

Psalms 148:1-6

Psalms 148: 7-12

Psalms 147: 4-6

Psalms 147: 7-9

Psalms 147: 15-18

Resource 4

Closing Prayer

Prayer Leader:

Tonight's prayer comes from the creation stories of the Book of Genesis and from the voice of St. Francis of Assisi who was named the patron saint of both animals and ecology.

(begin with the Sign of the Cross)

Most High God,

You guide all of creation with your loving care.

You have entrusted us with the care of your creation—people, animals, plants, air, water, and land. May we do what is necessary to sustain life here on earth and build your kingdom in faith.

We ask this in your Son's name. Amen.

Allow a moment of silence before continuing.

Reader 1:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty and darkness was over the surface." (Genesis 1:1-2)

Reader 2:

Saint Francis once prayed, "Most high, all powerful, all good. All praise is yours, all glory, all honor and all blessing. To you alone, Most High, do they belong. No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name." (The Canticle of Brother Sun)

After a moment of silence in the darkness, the prayer assistants will give each participant a paper bag filled with sand and a tealight candle (candle will not be inside the bag). Once everyone has received their bag and candle, Reader 1 begins.

Reader 1: (light a candle and then pass the flame to the person on their right. That person lights the candle of the person on their right and so on until everyone has a lit candle. Then leader instructs participants to carefully place their lit candles inside their bags and place them on the ground).

"And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light 'day' and the darkness 'night.' And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day." (Genesis 1:3-5)

Reader 2:

"All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you brighten up the night. How beautiful is he, full of power and strength!" (The Cantic of Brother Sun)

Prayer assistants move to the center of the circle, and blow bubbles as Readers 1 and 2 read their next lines.

Reader 1:

"And God said, 'Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.' And so it was so. God called the expanse 'sky' and there was evening and there was morning—the second day." (Genesis 1:6-8)

Reader 2:

"All praise be yours, My Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and fair and stormy, all weathers moods, by which you cherish all that you have made." (The Cantic of Brother Sun)

Prayer assistants bring bowls of water to the center of the circle and hold them up over their heads as the readers proclaim their passages. After the reading, the prayer assistants add their bowls of water to the sculpture of found objects in the center of the circle.

Reader 1:

"And God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered in to one place, and let dry ground appear.' And it was so. God called the dry ground 'land,' and the gathered waters were called 'seas.' And God saw that it was good." (Genesis 1:9-10)

Reader 2:

"All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Water, so useful, lowly, precious and pure." (The Cantic of Brother Sun)

Prayer Assistants carry the large pot and potting soil to the center of the circle. They each scoop some soil into the pot and then add the seeds.

Reader 1:

"Then God said, 'Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seeds in it, according to their various kinds.' And it was so. God saw that it was good and there was evening and there was morning—the third day." (Genesis 1:11-13)

Reader 2:

"All praise be to you, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother, who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs." (The Cantic of Brother Sun)

(Pause)

I invite you now to come forward and scoop some soil into the pot. When the flowers bloom, we will plant them at our church in honor of St. Francis.

Reader 1 waits until everyone has put some soil in the pot before beginning the next reading.

Reader 1:

“And God said, “Let there be light in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them give light on earth.’ And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. God also made the stars and saw that it was good. Thus, there was evening and morning—the fourth day.” (Genesis 1:14-19)

Reader 2:

“All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made!
First my Brother Sun who brings the day and light.
How beautiful the Sun is, how radiant in all his splendor!
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars: in the heavens you have made them, bright and precious and fair.” (The Canticle of Brother Sun)

Prayer Assistants sing very softly “Twinkle, twinkle little star how I wonder what you are. Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky. Twinkle , twinkle little star how I wonder what you are.” They then invite the rest of the participants to sing the song. After the song is sung, Reader 1 continues.

Reader 1:

“And God said, ‘Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.’ And it was so. God saw that it was good. Then there was evening and morning—the fifth day.” (Genesis 1:20-23)

Reader 2:

“Happy those who endure in peace, By you, Most High, they will be crowned.” (The Canticle of Brother Sun)

Prayer Assistants place various stuffed animals around the found objects sculpture.

Reader 1:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish in the sea and the birds of the air, over livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’
Ask participants to hold hands with the person on either side of them.
Thus, God created us in God’s own image. God saw that all creation was good—very good. Then there was evening and there was morning—the sixth day.” (Genesis 1:24-31)

Reader 2:

"All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin. Happy those she finds doing your will." (The Canticle of Brother Sun)

Prayer Assistants will join the sculpture by sitting or standing around the prayer focus. At this time, participants let go of each other's hands.

Reader 1:

"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work and so blessing the day, God rested." (Genesis 2:1-3)

Reader 2:

"Praise and bless my Lord. Give thanks and serve God with great humility." (The Canticle of Brother Sun)

Prayer Leader:

Please close your eyes and try to be very still... Listen to the sounds of creation all around us... Listen to the sound of your breath and the breath of the person next to you... Now that the air that you breathe is the same air that has been breathed for generations... It is the same air that your grandparents breathed and it is the same air that your children's children will breathe... The air you breathe is shared by all the living creatures of this world... You breathe the same air as the endangered tiger and the penguins living on the polar ice... You breathe the same air as a starving child in Mexico. This air may have been the last breath of a mother who died of AIDS in Africa... The air you are breathing right now may have been carried by the wind from Tibet, India, Iran, Afghanistan, or Japan... This air is the same whether your skin is white, black, brown, red, or yellow... This is the same air that a rich and famous person breathes and it is the same air a person struggling for survival in a third world country breathes... This air is the breath of God, breathed into all of us at creation... It is the air we breathe that reminds us that all of creation is interconnected and dependant upon each other for life... So breathe... breathe in the breath of God and remember that we are all one.

Allow a few moments of silence.

Prayer Leader:

Eternal God,

We thank you for the beauty of your creation,
a mystery that surpasses our imaginations.

We thank you for earth and water, sun, and moon.

We thank you for the animals and peoples that create our cultures and nations.

Strengthen us to protect all of creation.

Remind us that we too, are part of creation.

Enable us to change our current ways and renew our planet earth.

Amen.

