



UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA
ASSEMBLY

Season of Creation
2023

1 September – 4 October, 2023

LET JUSTICE AND PEACE FLOW

Introduction

Welcome to the Season of Creation!

Throughout the month of September, we join with Christians across the world in celebrating this annual season, an invitation to pray, act and reflect on our shared call to care for the earth - our common home and the good creation of God.

The theme for the Season of Creation in 2023 is, 'Let justice and peace flow.' The accompanying symbol is a mighty river, drawing on the cry of the prophet Amos: "But let justice roll down like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:24)

Inspired by this theme, we are inviting Uniting Church communities to worship outside in one of the weeks during the Season of Creation, gathering – where possible – around the rivers or waterways in your place. Through immersion in creation may you strengthen our bonds to the earth and sense of God's presence.

This worship resource is designed to spark your imagination in preparing this service and preparing your community to take part. The liturgy can be adapted as needed, including for those places where water may be scarce or where indoor worship may be more suited to the community.

The Uniting Church has long been committed to care for creation and ecological justice. Our faith calls us to love God and neighbour by caring for the world we share and being passionate advocates for our broken, beautiful, scarred and glorious creation.

This call has only grown louder as the ever-present threat to life posed by climate change continues to bear down on us and demands our action for the sake of our most vulnerable neighbours.

We inhabit a thirsty creation which is parched for justice and shows many signs of suffering. And yet, through the prophet Isaiah, we hear news of the God who promises "water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert" (Isaiah 43:20). May we take our place in that 'mighty river' of justice, peace and healing for a hurting world.

I pray this Season of Creation will be a rich and enriching time of prayerful reflection and action as you listen closely and seek God's presence in creation. May God bless the participation of your community.

Rev Sharon Hollis

President of the Uniting Church in Australia

Tips for holding this service outside

If you're gathering for outdoor worship, inviting people to be present and attentive to the space is the most important thing. Spend more time in silence than you normally might. Go at a slower pace. Worship can be shorter, more informal and more inclusive. Adapt this resource as needed.

Allow the place itself and the Holy Spirit to lead you. Encourage people to relax and be themselves. With children that means active exploring, gathering sticks and leaves, looking for signs of life and having fun. Adults can be encouraged to be mindful and to share their experiences with each other.

It is essential that any outdoor space chosen for worship is safe. If you are gathering by water, be aware of water safety particularly for children in your community. Encourage people to look out for each other.

Be aware of any accessibility needs in your community. Choose a space that is inclusive, for example, a park or garden with easy parking and seating available. You may be able to meet on your own church grounds where seating can be arranged as needed. Make sure those who need to sit can sit, and that all will be able to see, hear and participate.

Treat the space with respect and leave it as you found it.

Tips for holding this service inside

It may not be possible in every context or community to worship outdoors. In some parts of our country it may be difficult to find a body of water to gather around. In others, the weather may not permit. Don't worry, you can take your celebration of creation inside with the same sense of inclusion and attentiveness to our world!

Be creative in decorating the space and include symbols for water or creation, such as using blue fabric or displaying particular images. Even better if these are images of your local community or region. You might like to set up the church differently than usual to help people engage their senses and be reflective.

Make moments of prayer and reflection interactive or shared and allow silence to linger.

If you wanted to include the symbolism of gathering by water in your community, you could collect water during the week and use it to fill the bowl. You could also collect river stones or other symbols such as fallen gum leaves.

When speaking about creation during worship, be specific and name things and places in your region!

Service of Worship

Call to Worship

Friends, it is the Season of Creation!
Today we gather outside in the household of God,
surrounded by our broken, beautiful, scarred and glorious world,
joining our voice to earth's song of praise.

We gather to worship the God of rivers and oceans and waterfalls,
of rainforest and desert place.
We gather to hear the cry of the prophets and the groaning of creation,
and to join that mighty river of justice and peace.

We come to be quenched by living water, giver of life.
We come to plant our feet on this earth, parched for justice.

May the Creator, fountain of life,
Jesus the Christ, pulse of life,
and Holy Spirit, breath of life,
be always with you.
And also with you.

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of First Peoples is a way of paying respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whenever we gather together and an important expression of our covenant commitment to walk with First Peoples. Include in your Acknowledgement the name of the traditional lands on which you gather. You might like to acknowledge the ongoing connection to Country and care for creation by First Peoples in your place.

For example words to use go to:
<https://uniting.church/acknowledgement-of-country-in-the-ucca/>

Blessing for a sacred place (Aunty Rev Dr Denise Champion)

Leader: Arrawatanha Ngapala Nguthana

Response: **Most High, Our Maker**

All: The land you have given us, your children.
Look on this place ...
this special place where you live;
this special place where your glory rests.
Look upon this sacred place where your name is
honoured.
Help us keep it as our Ancestors did.

Leader: **Althaninda**

Response: Happy are you.

Invitation to be present to God's world

Take a minute to fully 'arrive' in this space. Settle into a comfortable position, stilling yourself. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your breath. Gradually expand your attention to the sounds and sights of the world around you.

Allow silence.

After a time, people could be invited to call out the sounds, smells, sights they have noticed. After each one, all respond with: "Thank you, God of creation!"

Conclude with a short, spoken prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Hearing the Word

You may like to include both or just one of these readings. You may like to use a few different voices, perhaps from different generations.

Amos 5:21-24 (MSG)

I can't stand your religious meetings.
I'm fed up with your conferences and conventions.
I want nothing to do with your religion projects,
your pretentious slogans and goals.
I'm sick of your fund-raising schemes,
your public relations and image making.
I've had all I can take of your noisy ego-music.
When was the last time you sang to me?
Do you know what I want?
I want justice—oceans of it.
I want fairness—rivers of it.
That's what I want. That's all I want.

Isaiah 43:15-21 (MSG)

14-15 God, your Redeemer,
The Holy of Israel, says:
"Just for you, I will march on Babylon.
I'll turn the tables on the Babylonians.
Instead of whooping it up,
they'll be wailing.
I am God, your Holy One,
Creator of Israel, your King."
16-21 This is what God says,
the God who builds a road right through the ocean,
who carves a path through pounding waves,
The God who summons horses and chariots and armies—
they lie down and then can't get up;
they're snuffed out like so many candles:

“Forget about what’s happened;
 don’t keep going over old history.
 Be alert, be present. I’m about to do something brand-new.
 It’s bursting out! Don’t you see it?
 There it is! I’m making a road through the desert,
 rivers in the badlands.
 Wild animals will say ‘Thank you!’
 —the coyotes and the buzzards—
 Because I provided water in the desert,
 rivers through the sunbaked earth,
 Drinking water for the people I chose,
 the people I made especially for myself,
 a people custom-made to praise me.

Responding to the Word

Depending on the context, you could respond to the reading/s in a few ways. When worshipping outdoors, informal and interactive works best. Possible options include:

- *A brief reflection (see reflection prompts and themes for inspiration)*
- *A brief discussion, either among the whole group or in pairs*
- *A song*
- *Walking a labyrinth*
- *Silence, prayer and meditation*
- *Invite people to reflect on images of creation from your local community or region*

Prayer of confession (Rev Alex Sangster)

This prayer of confession and water ritual can be used inside or outside.

For outside worship

In some contexts, it may be possible for the leader to get into the water to lead this prayer. Please only do this in shallow water (like a riverbank) and only if you can be assured it is safe. Alternatively, you could use a large bowl or pour water on the ground.

For indoor worship

Use a large bowl or something similar. If you wanted to include the symbolism of water in your community, you could collect this during the week and use it to fill the bowl. You could also collect river stones or other symbols of the riverbank such as gum leaves.

During the sung Kyries, pour the water lavishly.

We gather here by the waters
 the water shaping earth
 the water in our bodies
 the surging, the birthing, the baptism, the tears
 we gather and we say
 we are sorry

(SUNG) Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison

For the pollution and the pain and the disrespect and drought
for all that we have inflicted upon the waters of the world
we are sorry

Here, you could invite people to name their own confessions.

(SUNG) Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison

We sit by the waters,
we lay down and we weep
we say yes to the invitation to wash our apathy away

(SUNG) Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison

If you are worshipping inside or otherwise able to, for example if you have a speaker, play some music here (one suggestion is 'A River' by David Benjamin Blower. This is [available to stream](#))

Invite people to touch or pour the water as the song is playing.

Hear Christ's love to you all
Remember [young Stuart Moodie](#) who, in 2019
managed to rescue more than 100 native fish on the Mole River,
in far northern New South Wales,
by catching the fish by hand in muddy water
and moving them into larger waterholes.

Healing is possible.
Cleansing is possible.
We can form a mighty river of justice and peace.
Everything is possible with the love of God.

Prayers of the people

People are invited to offer their own prayers for creation out loud or could be invited to pray in small groups. You could pray as a community, with people each contributing a line.

As you gather people back or prepare for the sending, you could invite them to share what they will do this week to care for creation or to work for justice and peace.

Words of Mission (Rev Jon Humphries)

God,
As Christ you send us,
To be your apostolic Church
To go into the world
Flowing with grace
Eroding injustice
Flooding the world with peace and love.

Like rivers in the desert,
Bringing life giving water to all those who thirst,
May we be channels of your working,
Channelling justice and rightness,
Where there is a drought of hope because of their absence.
As we join with you as Spirit
In your mission of transformation, healing and redemption,
Be with us as you go before us.
Send us out once more to do your will.
Now and always.

And may the blessing of God, pulse of all that is,
Spirit of creation, brooding over the waters,
and Jesus the Christ, who was clothed in creation,
Go with us now from this place.
Amen.

Additional resources

A blessing for the Season of Creation (by Jessica Morthorpe)

As we gather in this season, may our eyes be open for God's face shining through creation,
and our ears be open to the words of creation's songs of praise.
May we worship among the wattle in a cathedral of the sky.
May the scent of eucalypt and petrichor be our incense.
May the rhythms of our liturgy be breath and wind and wave.
May the bees give their sermons, and the birds their wisdom.
May ripples and dandelion seeds carry our prayers to the ears of God.
May the freedom from walls widen our hearts and fill them with compassion.
And may we find peace in celebrating the rituals of time, season and growth.
May this be for us a sacred time to remember God's first gift to us,
and our first responsibility – to love and care for creation.
Amen.

Reflection prompts and themes

- Amos 5 (Let justice roll down like a river)
- Isaiah 43 (A way in the wilderness, streams in the desert)
- Water as a giver of life
- Water as powerful
- Living water
- Water as a symbol of baptism
- Water as cleansing

Song suggestions

Organisers of this service can decide how and where music might be best used.

If you are holding this service outside, it may work best to choose a short chorus that can be repeated rather than a few longer songs, unless you have transportable music or songs are well known! If your community would like to, you could spend some time learning songs during the Season of Creation that could then be sung outdoors.

- Kyrie Eleison (TiS 736)
- 'Come Holy Spirit' (Iona) (TiS 710)
- Bless the Lord, my Soul (Taize, TiS 706)
- Lord Jesus Christ, Lover of All (John Bell)
- How long (Robin Mann)
- For you, deep stillness (Robin Mann and Julie Perrin)
- Morning has broken (TiS 156)
- Beautiful Things (Gungor)
- I, the Lord of sea and sky
- The Summons (Will You Come and Follow Me) (John Bell, David

Peacock and Graham Maule.) CCLI Song Number 4983527.

YouTube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBq1YtpQL8>

- Gather Us In (TiS 474)

Acknowledgements

Thank you to those who have contributed to this resource, especially Aunty Rev Dr Denise Champion, Rev Alex Sangster (Advocate for the Working for Justice Circle) , Rev Jon Humphries (Advocate for the Transforming Worship Circle) and Jessica Morthorpe

You may be interested in books by Aunty Rev Dr Denise Champion, [Anaditj](#) and [Yarta Wandatha](#).

