

Hope for a New Heaven and a New Earth: CRS Natural Disaster Prayer Service (Leader's Guide)

Environment:

If time and resources allow, create an appropriate prayer focus with cloth draped over blocks. Place throughout the area a combination of twigs/sticks that are bare and dead mixed with flowers and leaved branches.

Items needed:

- Pot of sand, dirt and rocks (earth)
- Wind chimes or hand fan (air)
- Clear bowl of water (sea & rain)
- Candle (fire)
- 4 Readers
- 1 bible
- 1 Person to Present the Symbols

GATHERING SONG

Suggestions:

- *Canticle of the Sun* (Haugen)
- *Song at the Center* (Haugen)
- Or choose an appropriate song depending on the liturgical season

Leader: We gather together with our family and friends in this time of celebration of the new life of Jesus and the new hope for our world. We also come together in commemoration of those who passed into the next life through the natural disasters of the Tsunami, Hurricane Katrina and all other disasters that have touched our lives this past year. In thanksgiving for the gifts left to us from those that died, we invite the Lord into our presence, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: We live on an earth that is always moving. Think of the sound of pine tree branches swaying in the wind. Recall the smell of the earth when one plants flowers or vegetables. Think of the sound of the ocean water crashing against rocks and beaches. This is the earth, at turns whispering and wailing. The earth cries out in other ways too: the winds that move waters to destroy community's and peoples, fire that can burn thousands of acres of trees. We, humans are part of the earth that is groaning. We are part of that biosphere that can enable wondrous works or by our lack of vision and understanding, destroy life.

Leader Cont: It is at times like these, when we remember the raw power of the earth, and we remember the strength of a people gathered for the one purpose of helping others, that the grace and love of God is present in our midst. The Lord speaks to each one of us to the purpose of making the world a place where everyone is able to enjoy the sounds of the earth sighing; to enjoy the fruits of the earth, enjoy a cool breeze and enjoy life-giving water.

Now, we will listen to the first reading from Isaiah. Here, Isaiah is speaking of the covenantal relationship between God, humans, and the earth. As a people, we follow God's ways and in doing so, a new heaven and a new earth will be created, where there will be no more miseries, and all will live in harmony.

FIRST READING

Reader 1: Isaiah 65, 17-25.

(Pause for silent reflection.)

PRESENTATION OF THE ELEMENTS

Leader: We honor the gift of the earth.

(The Presenter lifts up the pot of "earth.")

Reader 2: Lord, you give birth to all of life through the creative forces of the earth. From the beginning of time, we have been intimately joined to the earth. From our very creation to our playful exploration, from our molding and walking the land to our growing and harvesting of fields, from our gazes upon its grandeur to our moment of return upon death, it is in the fertile and fruitful bending and circling that life is created and sustained.

It is in the same creative forces erupting with a shaking and trembling that life is often interrupted and destroyed. Witness the earthquake in Pakistan, Kashmir, India and Afghanistan that has left cities in rubble and tens of thousands dead. The onset of winter and its freezing temperatures further expose people to the harsh realities of life on the land.

(The Presenter places the pot onto the prayer space.)

Reader 3: Married and a father of three, Khalid was a hotel manager before the earthquake struck in Pakistan. He now spends his days removing rubble, identifying people in need of critical help, and distributing life-saving supplies. In reflection about the day of the earthquake, Khalid shares, "Suddenly, I remembered she had already gone to school..."

Reader 3 Cont: Without thinking, I ran directly to the school to search for my daughter. When I arrived at the school, I could barely recognize the building. I could only see the roof of the building, dust, and rubble. I heard the horrible screams and crying of children beneath the earthquake debris. Many other men joined me, and we starting clearing away rubble and debris as quickly as possible. We saved 36 children that day, but over 220 children were pronounced dead. After much fear and what seemed like hours, I finally saw my daughter's hand reaching through the debris. I don't know how I recognized her hand, but I did. I snatched her through the debris. She broke her foot and sustained several bruises, abrasions, and cuts, but at least she was still was alive."

(Source: CRS)

Leader: Let us respond...

All: Lord of all creation, let your love and justice be planted in the hearts of all. Give us the courage to create new life in the world.

Leader: We honor the gift of air.

(The Presenter lifts up the chimes or fan.)

Reader 2: Lord, you breathe life into us with the air that surrounds and envelops us. As the breeze soothes and cools, we are refreshed and renewed. With the lift of flowing currents, creation soars with the strength of eagles and is carried with faith to new heights. Winds sculpt a natural architecture that engenders hope and inspiration.

It is the same life-giving air that whips into fury and rouses raging storms of chaos and destruction. A record number of hurricanes, in particular Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Stan and Wilma, threatened to erase cities and communities from the map and left thousands dead in their wake.

(The Presenter places the chimes or fan onto the prayer space.)

Reader 3: On the morning of September 8, the sound of someone playing the piano in the basement of St. Mary Basilica in Natchez caught Father David O'Connor's attention. After some investigation, Fr. David found Babbette Delafont and her 11-year-old daughter, Bridgette, at the piano. At the sight of the priest, Babbette Delafont started crying. "I told Father O'Connor everything," she said. "He then got on the telephone and started calling people."

Father O'Connor learned that the mother and daughter were hurricane victims from Harahan, LA, having left their home to safely stay with a cousin in town and out of the main path of Hurricane Katrina. However, the Delafonts had not

Reader 3 Cont: been able to connect with any services, had no identification, no transportation and were wandering around looking for some kind of help. The main shelter was overcrowded and overburdened.

After learning their story, Father O'Connor took them to the rectory where they met another displaced pair, Dr. Charles Nolan and his wife, Gayle, who had been staying at the rectory since the hurricane. "The Nolans were so sweet to us," said Babbette Delafont.

With 24 hours, the Nolans drove the Delafonts to Cathedral Elementary, and helped Babbette register her daughter. Soon enough, they were offered help by another parent who bought uniform outfits for Bridgette and clothing for her mother. Within time, Bridgette was attending fifth grade at Cathedral Elementary School. "It's the only thing right now keeping me up," said Bridgette. "I'm looking forward to it."

(source: Catholic News Service)

Leader: Let us respond...

All: Lord of all creation, let your love and justice whisk like the wind through the hearts of all. Give us the courage to breathe new life into the world.

Leader: We honor the gift of fire.

(The Presenter lifts up the candle.)

Reader 2: Lord, your divine light shines throughout the world. As the sun pulsates energy into all of creation, so, too, does its light warm the cold and awaken new life after winter's death. As fire lit the way across the desert's night, we too search for light to guide us through the darkness of life. In the glow of the fire, stories unfold and we come to know dearly the comfort of friendship.

Yet in its wildness and might, fire consumes creation -- the land and the living. Heat waves and dry weather contribute to a drought that inflames famine and human misery in Niger. The world's largest rainforest is plagued with its worst drought in decades that release intense wildfires in the Amazon basin, poison drinking water and sicken river dwellers, and destroy a significant array of the rich tropical life as streams dry up.

(The Presenter places the candle onto the prayer space.)

Reader 3: Niger is one of the hottest countries in the world. Its climate is harsh where the intense heat often causes the rain to evaporate before it hits the ground. Amidst any given sand-filled, wind-swept day in northern Niger, evidence can be found of the over 400,000 nomads living in this desert region. You can see them as they trek across the desert in constant search for water and pasture for their camels, sheep, and cattle. Small boys are observed shepherding the herds, and young girls are seen working around the family's traditional nomad tents. Among these nomadic cattle herders are the beautiful Wodaabe people.

In spite of the harsh living conditions, the Catholic Mission of Maradi worked with its partners to create a culturally sensitive education alternative for nomad children. In order for nomad children to attend school, provisions were made to assure that they have enough food to eat and a place to stay while their families migrate away from their schools. Through the project, girls who would often be kept at home to help cook and do housework, are offered the opportunity to learn as well as to contribute to the development of their people. Gaya, a nine-year-old Wodaabe girl, in the village attends school in a small rectangular hut made of millet stalks. There are 17 other children in her school who learn reading, writing, French among other subjects. In the coming months, Gaya and her classmates will learn about how to care for animals through the school herds and gardens project. Gaya shares, "I like reading a lot and singing the French song "Mes Amis (My Friends)." In the evenings Gaya and other children in her village entertain themselves by singing traditional Wodaabe songs under the stars.

(Source: CRS Food Fast)

Leader: Let us respond...

All: Lord of all people, let your love and justice burn like fire in the hearts of all. Give us the courage to bring your light into the world.

Leader: We honor the gift of water.

(Presenter lifts up the bowl of water.)

Reader 2: Lord, with water we were baptized and welcomed into new life with you. Water quenches our thirst and nourishes body and soul. Its cleansing power refreshes and heals. The babbling brook calms and soothes, while the roaring waterfall energizes and inspires. In the blessing of creation, water allows us to accentuate the sacredness of life.

In as much as water is necessary for life, its overwhelming deluge drowns the meek and obliterates the mightiest of structures. The cataclysmic tsunami disaster that spread from Asia to Africa epitomized the devastation and despair

Reader 2 Cont: often experienced throughout the world this year, especially with the flooding in the Philippines, the Gulf Coast, Mexico and Guatemala.

(The presenter places the bowl onto the prayer space.)

Reader 3: After the tsunami, Mr. Herbert surveyed the destruction in his small seaside village just south of Galle, Sri Lanka. Where there were once homes and neighborhoods lay only rubble – debris of uprooted trees, crumbled walls and scattered possessions. But one concrete slab in the middle of the village was cleared and scrubbed clean. On the slab were two white plastic chairs salvaged from the rubble. This is the home of Mr. Herbert, who smiles at passers-by and invites them into his home. When asked how he finds the courage to carry on, Mr. Herbert proudly says, “I am a fisherman. I will fish again. My sons will cast their nets into the sea.”

(Source: CRS)

Leader: Let us respond...

All: Lord of all creation, let your love and justice flow like water through the hearts of all. Give us the courage to bring your healing into the world.

(Pause for silent reflection)

SECOND READING:

Reader 1: Mark 4, 35-41

(Pause for silent reflection.)

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

Reader 4: As we lift our prayers to the Lord, please reply, “God of Hope, hear our prayer.”

All: God of Hope, hear our prayer.

Reader 4: We pray for the victims of all natural disasters. For the elderly without shelter, for the children without schools, and for those who have lost loved ones; may comfort be theirs amidst this painful time. We pray to the Lord:

All: God of Hope, hear our prayer.

Reader 4: We pray for the victims of all man-made disasters. For the people of Sudan, Colombia, and all who suffer as a result of violence and greed; may justice bloom in their lives. We pray to the Lord:

All: God of Hope, hear our prayer.

Reader 4: We pray for those who give care to victims of disasters. For all emergency aid workers, relief organizations, and especially those who are both caretakers and victims; may they be strengthened in their critical work. We pray to the Lord:

All: God of Hope, hear our prayer.

Reader 4: We pray for the Church. For her leadership, religious, and laity; that she may be a prophetic voice and an active hand in the protection of our world's most vulnerable populations. We pray to the Lord:

All: God of Hope, hear our prayer.

Reader 4: We pray for all creation. For the deep sea, the high mountain cliffs, the fruit of the Earth, and the air we breathe; may we be creation's gentle caretakers recognizing our interdependence. We pray to the Lord:

All: God of Hope, hear our prayer.

Reader 4: We pray for all gathered here. That each of us may come to a fuller appreciation for the gifts in our lives; and that we may have the courage to seek out ways to serve our brothers and sisters in need. We pray to the Lord:

All: God of Hope, hear our prayer.

SIGN OF PEACE

Leader: Creator God, realizing that we are part of one human family, let us extend the sign of peace to each other. (*Exchange of the sign of peace.*)

Leader: We stand here with You, the Artist of creation, on an earth that continues to express her pain and joy for the life You have given to all. We are reborn each day in Your Ways, Master-builder. Send us forth to reconcile all your peoples to each other and to the earth. We ask this in your name...

All: Amen.

SENDING SONG:

Suggestions:

- *How Can I Keep from Singing* (Lowry)
- *Prayer for Peace* (Haas)
- *We Are Many Parts* (Haugen)