Mennonite Church Canada

Mennonite Church USA

Journeying with Creation

Advent prayers in a time of climate change

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2024

Together in Worship
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Introduction: How to use this resource

Dear reader,

Welcome here! Welcome to advent, a season where we journey with shepherds and sheep, magi and camels, Mary, Joseph, and a donkey. We invite you to join us on this journey in praying for the earth and its inhabitants in the context of our current world - one with a changing climate.

This is a resource designed to help us wait together, prayerfully, holding both hope and lament for the earth and its people in our gently cupped hands. We are so grateful that by picking up this resource you've decided to pray for this good and suffering planet with us.

So how do I use this resource? There are several ways, and none of them is wrong! It is designed to be used by congregations, small groups, households, or individuals. Here is the basic framework:

There are seven entries - one for each Sunday of Advent, one for Christmas Day, one following Christmas, and a final one for Epiphany. We wrote these entries to line up with the Leader Magazine (Fall 2024) Advent-Epiphany resources, with scripture texts from Year 3 of the Narrative Lectionary. However, you can pray these prayers any year following as well.

Each week's entry contains four parts:

- The title, theme, and scriptures
- A prayer to be prayed alone, with a group, or adapted into a litany
- An invitation to action for you and your community
- An image to contemplate prayerfully

A note about the images:
We suggest giving each image space (3-10 minutes) to nestle into your spirit and find some resonance there. The practice of praying with images is sometimes referred to as *visio divina*. This resource is designed to be used digitally or printed double-sided on standard letter sized paper, so that each entry has an image on the left and text on the right. We do not recommend printing in black and white as some images will not show up well. If you don't have access to color printing, we recommend viewing the images digitally. When you click on the image in the document, it will bring you back to the

download page for this document, where you can also download the images. If you are using the images in a worship service or otherwise sharing them, please use the proper attribution, as seen below the images in this resource.

We want to acknowledge with gratitude the artists who gave permission for us to use their work: Kelly Latimore, Marnie Klassen, Scott Erickson, and Christi Belcourt. We are also grateful to the artists whose creative commons work we were able to include: Claude Monet, Tina Blau, and the photographer Robin Stott.

We are thankful for collaboration with and support from Sandy Plett (Climate Action Coordinator, Mennonite Church Canada) and Arlyn Friesen Epp (Director, CommonWord Bookstore and Resource Centre) and the whole team at CommonWord.

Thanks to the planning team who prepared the 2024-25 Advent-Epiphany resource *Together on the Journey* for Leader Magazine*,* whose themes guided our writing.

And thanks to you, for engaging with this work, this art, and these prayers. Thanks be to God!

With gratitude and anticipation,

Marnie Klassen, on behalf of Mennonite Church Canada

Karla Stoltzfus Detweiler, Climate Justice Coordinator, Mennonite Church USA

Claude Monet. *Tempête sur les Côtes de Belle-Île*. Oil on canvas, 1886. (Public domain).

First Week of Advent - Praying about Extreme Weather Events

2024 Leader Magazine theme: Between a Rock and a Hard Place: How Do We Continue On?

Year 3 Narrative Lectionary texts: Daniel 6:6–27; Luke 23:1–5

Praying together:

Marvelous Maker of the World,

Your love birthed an exquisite, pulsing orb of Life.

Now storms rage, wildfires burn, and heatwaves parch your beloved Earth.

We have disrupted the web of life; let your grace knit us into place again.

We grieve the loss of homes and habitats; let us taste your tears as you cry with us.

We're afraid of disasters yet to come; grow our trust in your compassionate presence.

We feel ineffective to change harmful systems; grant us courage to speak truth to power.

May the groans of your people and earth become birth pangs as shalom is born anew.

Amen.

Invitation to action:

- Make a donation this week to support disaster relief work. Any amount, large or small, helps! Potential organizations to support include: Mennonite Disaster Service, Mennonite Central Committee, and Habitat for Humanity. Alternatively, consider donating directly to a mutual aid society in an area affected by recent climate-related disasters.

Tina Blau. *Stones, Soil, Grasses, oil study for the painting "An der Friedhofsmauer."* Oil on panel, 1870s. (Public domain).

(Rotate ninety degrees clockwise to view in the original orientation)

Second Week of Advent - Praying for Land and Water

2024 Leader Magazine theme: Opening Hearts: What Do We Ask For?

Year 3 Narrative Lectionary texts: Joel 2:12–13, 28–29; Luke 11:13

Praying together:

Oh God, you who are ready to forgive,

Long have we lived with and relied on generous land
and quenching water.

But now we tear at our hearts, sorrowing at their desecration.

We know that you who pour living water, also yearn to pour out your Spirit on us,
both despoilers and protectors of your sacred earth.

And so we plead with you, oh Forgiving God:

Let your Spirit flow towards those protecting sacred land and water;
Let us thirst for you, even as we are parched for hope, drowning in sorrow;
Let your suffering land heal, your streams flow as you made them to.

We turn to your Spirit;

Amen.

Invitation to action:

- Set aside 30 minutes this week to learn about your watershed - where does your water drain to? Whose land are you on? Research your watershed, native plants, or local Indigenous territory.

- Additionally, look into how you can support land and water protectors in your country - for example, supporting the Apache stronghold in Arizona, or the Grassy Narrows community in Ontario.

Kelly Latimore. *Tent City Nativity*. Acrylic, flashe and gold leaf on board, 2022. (Used with permission).

Third Week of Advent - Praying for Those Most Affected by Climate Change

2024 Leader Magazine theme: Anointing for Justice: Who Belongs?

Year 3 Narrative Lectionary texts: Isaiah 61:1–11; Luke 4:16–21

Praying together:

Liberating God,

You dream of a world where all people drink from the pure waters of Life;
where all are nourished by the tree of Life.

Free all your children—black, brown, white, rich and poor—
from pollution that poisons water, sickens soil, and chokes breath.

Liberate all your children—two-legged, furry, winged, and microscopic ones—
from economies that extract for profit.

Unshackle all your children—Indigenous, settlers, immigrants and native born—
from systems that force abandonment of sacred lands and lifeways.

With Jesus, let us pursue freedom for the oppressed,
which is freedom for us all.

Amen.

Invitation to action:

- Schedule a time in the New Year to volunteer at a local housing organization (like Habitat for Humanity), poverty reduction organization, or home weatherization project.

- Alternatively, if you drive, put together some glove-box goodie bags with socks, mitts, and heat packs to give to low-income individuals on cold days.

Robin Stott. *Geography students undertaking fieldwork in the dunes of the Dyfi nature reserve*. Digital photograph, 2015. (cc-by-sa/2.0, geograph.org.uk).

Fourth Week of Advent - Praying for Climate Helpers

2024 Leader Magazine theme: Embodying God's Spirit: Who Lends a Hand?

Year 3 Narrative Lectionary texts: Luke 1:26–49; Psalm 113

Praying together:

God of reason and mystery, science and poetry,

When we look around at our changing earth, it is easy to point fingers at those doing harm;

Move us to also look for the helpers, to notice those whose work is to bless the earth.

Move our leaders; transform their hearts to love, their actions to help.

As we await the Savior's birth, we pray for all who labour to bring forth New Creation:

Climate scientists, ecosystem restorers, politicians, farmers, activists, biologists, policy writers, citizen scientists, and all others who love the earth with hands and minds.

Like Mary, who claimed her role as your willing and capable servant, we ask for courage to bless the earth with the work of our bodies.

Encourage all helpers of the earth, remind them that they are led by your grace and surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.

Amen.

Invitation to action:

- Read the work of a climate scientist (like Katherine Hayhoe, Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, or Rick Lindroth) and journal about what comes up. Consider starting a reading group for an article or book at your church or in your community!

- Did you know you can participate in climate and environmental science in your region? Look for citizen science opportunities near you (like these in Canada or these in the USA).

Marnie Klassen. *Feast*. 35mm film, 2021. (Used with permission).

Christmas Day- Heralding Peace on Earth

Year 3 Narrative Lectionary texts: Luke 2:8-20; Psalm 123:1-2

Praying together:

God-with-us,

Angels heralded your arrival, proclaiming "Peace on Earth!"
This day, we join their song, heralding signs of your shalom.

We herald the peace of the stars that still shine,
singing of your grandeur and our finitude.

We herald the peace of the sheep,
who sing to us of trust and reciprocity.

We herald the peace of shepherds,
singing of fear turned to joy in your cosmic plan.

We herald the peace of Jesus, Emmanuel,
who sings of your love for the whole, aching world;
love that dwells in earthy bodies;
love that is birthing wholeness, even now, among us.

Amen.

Invitation to action:

- As you read the Christmas story today, consider the role of each part of creation in the story: stars, sheep, land, and stable animals. If gathered with your household or community, wonder about this together in conversation.
- As you share food with others in celebration of Jesus' birth, give thanks for the land, water, animals, and people whose labor and generosity contribute to your nourishment.

Scott Erickson. *With Us - Incarnation*. Painting, 2016. (Used with permission).

Sunday Following Christmas - Praying for Future Generations

2024 Leader Magazine theme: Keeping Promises: Who Sees It?

Year 3 Narrative Lectionary texts: Luke 2:21–38; Psalm 131

Praying together:

God who bears witness to all of human history,

We have inherited the task of climate care from our ancestors, who made decisions knowingly or ignorantly that have defiled your creation.
When we grow weary, remind us that our ancestors, like Simeon and Anna, also lived in expectation of your renewal.

Our children, born, befriended, or not yet dreamed of, rely on us for a liveable future.
For their sake, grant us endurance.

Teach us that we are ancestors of children not yet born, anxiously awaiting a future.
Grant that we may be faithful forebears.

Let us reflect, remembering the seven generations that precede us, learning from our inherited gifts and challenges;
And let us live, imagining the seven generations that will come after us, trusting and acting towards a world of beauty, a planet of sustenance.

Amen.

Invitation to action:

- Find out what your local school curriculum teaches about climate, land, and biodiversity. Advocate for improvements! Check out this kids and climate newsletter for ideas that support climate education and action in schools.

- Alternatively, find a day to volunteer with an outdoor education program in your town, or simply make a financial donation to one.

Christi Belcourt. *Wisdom of the Universe*. Acrylic on canvas, 2014. (Used with permission).

Epiphany Sunday - Praying for Biodiversity

2024 Leader Magazine theme: Nurturing Faith: From Whom Do We Learn?

Year 3 Narrative Lectionary texts: Luke 2:41–52;Psalm 2:7–8

Praying together:

Creator and Animator of Life,

You rejoice in penguins and plankton,
oaks and olives, humans and hippopotamuses.

But God, we confess that we have spoiled their homes, and ours.
We lament the daily extinction of precious species.

Can we who have done so much harm, learn to extend healing?
Can we learn to honor and protect those whom you have made?

Help us to perceive your wisdom woven into rocks and trees, skies and seas.
Let us listen attentively to our kin who remember how to protect land and water.

Fill us with your confidence and delight
as we practice the sacred dance of renewal.

Amen.

Invitation to action:

- Learn about a threatened species in your area, and find out what you can do to help protect it.

- As you dream of the upcoming growing season, plan to host more biodiversity where you live. Consider planting native plants like milkweed, a wildflower mix, grasses or trees - in a pot, in a garden, or in a collective space like church property.