

TAIZE SERVICES FOR EARTH

During her 20 years as senior minister at Unity Church of North Idaho, Marilyn Muehlbach developed a fruitful collaboration with the music team. Starting with the Taize¹ worship style, and inspired by their attendance at Agape International music conferences, their work together evolved into an intuitive interweaving of group chant, prayer, solo songs, and even dance that graced the Sunday service meditations. The *Taize Services for Thanksgiving Eve* grew into a tradition that has continued after Marilyn's departure in 2005, moving between different themes. The following two services, from 2002 and 2004, were devoted to our relationships with Earth and its inhabitants.

Reflecting back on the services, Marilyn writes,

One of the fun parts of these services was Steve Croteau's percussion. He had a big, soft bass drum on which he played a heartbeat under the prayers and the talking. It was very effective. We also had a Native American flute, which was a nice addition.

The key is in making it all seamless - one part flowing into the next without big pauses while the musicians get up and down, etc.

I'm excited that some of these special services which we used only once will be more widely available.

Following the two services are a songsheet for the closing hymn and a list of songs suggested by Julie Croteau, music director at Unity Church of North Idaho. Sources for the two group chants and the closing hymn are included. For more information or assistance, please contact the church at (208) 664-1125 or unity@unitycenter.org.

These services were written for Thanksgiving, but their themes of healing our relationships with each other and our planet are suitable for any occasion. We hope your music ministry will be inspired by these expressions of gratitude for Earth's many blessings!

Gratefully,
Unity Earth Care Northwest
3 December 2008

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¹ A group of Catholic monks in Taize, France, established a community to serve special needs people. Believing that prayer and music were a universal language that could be understood in the hearts of all, they developed a beautiful spiritual service of rotating prayer and music to bring people together.

**TAIZE SERVICE FOR EARTH #1
THANKSGIVING EVE 2002**

**Rev. Marilyn Muehlbach
Unity Church of North Idaho, Coeur d'Alene**

OPENING MUSIC - *Guardians of the Earth* (all musicians)²

WELCOME

Welcome to our Thanksgiving Eve Taize Service (leader)

Offering Blessing (leader)

While Offering is being received, teach Chant (all musicians)

TEACH CHANT - *The Heart of the World* (everyone present)³

The heart of the world beats in me now.

The light of the world shines through me.

The song of the world sings through me now.

I am the heart of the world.

LEAD IN - Quotes (readers)

From Lewis Thomas: "Viewed from the distance of the Moon, the astonishing thing about the Earth, catching the breath, is that it is alive."

A Kenyan Proverb says: "Treat the earth well . . . it was not given to you by your parents, it was lent to you by your children."

From Chief Seattle: "This we know: The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. . . Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life: he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web he does to himself."

From the Very Reverend James Park Morton: "In Holy Communion God transforms the stuff of everyday reality into the body of Christ . . . in such a miraculous way that literally everything - everything, every rock, every atom, every galaxy, every man, woman and child, every flower, every wolf, every whale become linked, connected, bound together as kin, mutually transparent to the divine radiance."

² Music selections are done by a group of performers. Other songs or hymns may be substituted. See song list on page 12 for suggestions.

³ Chant and closing hymn are done by everyone present, including congregation. Songsheet is provided on page 11; sources for chant and hymn are on page 12.

From the U.N. Environmental Sabbath Program: "We join together as many and diverse expressions of one loving memory: for the healing of the earth and the renewal of all life."

Pilgrim Woman said: "Think, pray, roll up your sleeves, do whatever it takes. This is the only earth we've got. Without it we'd be in an awful fix."

The Earth is our home. Her trees, her mountains, her air, water, grass and soil nourish our bodies and souls. They refresh our spirit. Our Earth is changing - some say suffering. She is changing faster than she is able to repair herself . . . and we are responsible. If we are responsible for the destruction of our Earth, then we can also be instruments of her healing. We have much to be thankful for, but we must also increase our awareness and change our way of walking on this Earth.

Stand up. Stand well balanced, centered. Plant your feet solidly on the floor. Feel your connection to the ground, let the ground support you. The place on which you stand is holy ground. This is a sacred time. Tonight we offer our blessings and thanksgiving to our Earth. We also recognize our responsibility. As we pray, we open ourselves to guidance and the possibility of action - in ways small or large - we let God move in us, arousing our awareness, awakening our gratitude and compassion, moving us to do our part to insure the healthy balance of our living home, the Earth.

You may be seated. . . Breathe deeply . . . relax. . . and enjoy . . .

1. Prayers for the People of Earth (peace, population control) wisdom, education, respect

Chant - *The Heart of the World*

Talk (leader) - There are over 6,258,000,000 people living on our Earth, increasing at a rate 140 people every minute. By the year 2050 there will be 9 billion of us eating, breathing, living - searching for meaning and space in which to live our lives. We reject war and violence as a means of population control. Likewise, starvation and the ravages of disease. We call on our God-given wisdom, education, respect and generosity to create a population that will sustain a balance that supports good, meaningful lives for all the people of the Earth.

Music (solo) - *Stay Low to the Ground*

Prayer (reader 1) - Creator of All Life, we give thanks for the gift of Mother Earth. We feel her struggle with so many people. We accept responsibility to help educate ourselves, and we are open to your guidance and wisdom, God, on how to walk this path. We see the people living in respect for one another and for the planet. You are the Source of our good and we are deeply grateful for the abundance of the Earth that presents itself to us everyday.

Silence

2. Prayers for the Air we breathe (pollution, decreasing oxygen) wisdom, awareness

Chant - *The Heart of the World*

Talk (leader) - Breathe in. Breathe out. Keep breathing. We are blessed with clean, fresh air. This air is essential for our survival. With every breath we feed the cells of our bodies with life-giving oxygen that will keep them (and us) healthy. While the percentage of toxic gases in the air we breathed has increased from zero to significant amounts over the last 250 years, we have adapted. The faster we pump particulate and other pollutants into the air, the more difficulty we have in adapting - the more difficult it is to breathe. Nearly 25% of the people in the United States breathe air that is below the minimal air quality standards set by our government. Be wise. Be aware. Protect the air we breathe.

Music (duet) - *Soaring Like the Wind / All the Air Is Sacred*

Prayer (reader 2) - Take a deep breath, hold it for a moment, gently release, and take another - feel it moving through your body touching every cell. This is the very breath of God. We live because we are one with God and because God breathes through us. We turn to the God within and open ourselves to clean pure air. We are aware that by our very living we affect the air, and we are open to Spirit's creativity in caring for it. We breathe that we may live. Thank you Divine Spirit for this gift. We treat it wisely.

Silence

3. Prayers for The Water we drink (pollution, dwindling fresh water supply) maintain generous flow

Chant - *The Heart of the World*

Talk (leader) - Our bodies are 90% water. We need water to sustain life. The Northwest is blessed with an abundance of pure, clear water to drink. Our community overflows with lakes, rivers, mountain streams and our precious Rathdrum Aquifer. Other parts of the world are not as fortunate. Pure water is becoming an ever more precious (and dwindling) resource. We give thanks for the water we have and do what we can to maintain its generous flow.

Music - (improvisational water music with dancing)

Prayer (reader 3) - Precious Spirit, fresh and cold, everywhere we look we are renewed by the sight of lakes and rivers, pure water bubbling up from the depths of Mother Earth. Because we are made of water we identify with this abundant flow. We see our water clean, sparkling, fresh and pure. We feel it caressing our bodies, and we give thanks for this refreshment.

Silence

4. Prayers for the Climate of Earth (warming) awareness, choices

Chant - *The Heart of the World*

Talk (leader) - Our Earth is a smorgasbord of varying climates. There are hot spots, places with sunshine and warmth year round. There are cold climates where the temperatures remain below freezing all year long. And there are wonderful places everywhere in between these extremes. But the cold places are in danger. The glaciers are melting, much of the world is experiencing drought, some of our great old cities are being destroyed by floods, the temperatures are rising . . . our planet is warming up. Could it reach a temperature that would no longer support life as we know it? We give thanks for the richness of climates on our Earth and agree to seriously consider our options before we make choices that will impact our climate.

Music (solo) - (original song)

Prayer (reader 4) - Oh Great Mystery, we give thanks for our wonderful planet with its varied temperatures and climates. We appreciate the warmth of the sun and the cold of the snow. We acknowledge our need for a variety of climates. We know that you will give us the knowledge to protect this precious environment so that we may continue to be blessed by all the temperatures of our earth.

Silence

5. Prayers for the Rain Forests (disappearing) listen to the trees

Chant - *The Heart of the World*

Talk (leader) - At one time our Earth was covered with forests. The trees in these forests breathed oxygen into our air and supported a diversity of plants and animals that contributed to our health. But the forests are disappearing at an alarming rate. Yes, dwindling water supplies have an effect as do polluted air and a warming climate. But the biggest threat is our growing population - people cutting down the trees to make room for homes and profits for businesses and the men and women who run them. What would the forests be telling us if we could hear their cries? Keep breathing, we say. Thank you for breathing.

Music (duet) - *Amazon*

Prayer (reader 5) - Listen to the trees. Listen to the stories the leaves tell as they rustle in the wind. Listen to Grandmother Cedar and Grandfather Oak. We breathe their very life. Teach us to replace the trees we harvest. Let us become willing to put aside our desire for flat bare land on which to live and raise our animals. As we become open to our indwelling guidance we cherish these our relatives.

Silence

6. Prayers for Diversity of our Plants and Animals (extinction) awareness, choice, sacrifice

Chant - *The Heart of the World*

Talk (leader) - The web of life is complicated and diverse. A healthy balance is maintained by healthy biodiversity - and this, too, is threatened. Human beings, once an important part of this balance, are now wielding disproportionate destruction. Species are becoming extinct at what scientists say is an alarming rate. If present trends continue half of all species on Earth will be extinct in one hundred years. We haven't yet learned how to replace them. Once a plant or an animal disappears, it is gone. Another species may arise to fill the gap, but we may not like the results and the balance becomes increasingly precarious. We give thanks for the rich diversity on our planet, and do what we can to protect it.

Music (solo) - *Take These Wings*

Prayer (reader 6) - From chipmunks to lions, from lizards to whales, from parakeets to eagles, from kelp to the mighty redwoods, we give thanks for this rich diversity, and we recognize our need for balanced ecology. We respect the natural equilibrium provided by our Creator. We choose to live respectfully and walk lightly.

Silence

7. Prayers for our Earth (Gaia, our living, breathing planet) awareness, protection, gentle, thoughtful care

Chant - *The Heart of the World*

Talk (leader) - We bless and give thanks for our fragile planet Earth, our home. She sustains, supports and nourishes our physical existence and feeds our soul and spirit. We do our part to move forward only at the pace of our planet's ability to move with us, sustaining her delicate balance, nourishing her life. We pledge our awareness to our Earth. We pledge our protection to our Earth. We pledge our gentle care to our Earth.

Music (trio) - *Hawaii*

Prayer (reader 7) - Precious Spirit, we honor Mother Earth, our planet, our home. You have made us stewards of the land and the abundance of all it holds. We accept this challenge, knowing you are the Source of the lessons we need to live wisely. We remember how the planet looks from outer space and we hold that image in our minds. We protect our Mother Earth.

Silence

FINALE - *This Is Our World* (all musicians)

BENEDICTION (leader) - We go forth, giving thanks to God and singing praises to our precious blue-green Mother Earth.

CLOSING HYMN - *Blue Green Hills of Earth*

**TAIZE SERVICE FOR EARTH #2
THANKSGIVING EVE 2004**

**Rev. Marilyn Muehlbach
Unity Church of North Idaho, Coeur d'Alene**

OPENING MUSIC – *Om Nama Shivaya* (all performers)⁴

WELCOME (leader)

Welcome to our Thanksgiving Eve Taize Service
Offering Blessing
While Offering is being received – teach Chant

TEACH CHANT – *O Great Spirit* (everyone present)⁵

O Great Spirit
Earth, Sun, Sky and Sea
You are inside
And all around me.

LEAD IN (leader)

Taize – what it is
Chant, Thought, Music, Prayer, Silence
Eyes Open, Eyes Closed – experience

The Great Mystery is a name that is often used for God. The wonder of the Universe is said to be God in expression. We live, move and have our being in the magnificent expression of God. The Earth is our home, brilliant in blue and white, brown and green. It is here on our Earth that the elements of fire, water, earth and air gather together, meet and join, and life takes form and substance and begins to grow. This is a place where life can be and become. The trees, mountains, air, water, grass and soil nourish our bodies and souls. They refresh our spirit. We have much to be thankful for, but we must also increase our awareness and learn to walk gently on this Earth.

Stand up. Stand well balanced, centered. Plant your feet solidly on the floor. Feel your connection to the ground, let the ground support you. The place on which you stand is holy ground. This is a sacred time. Tonight we offer our blessings and thanksgiving to Spirit, the elements of the Earth, to life itself and to our Oneness with all that is. We also recognize our responsibility. As we pray, we open ourselves to guidance and the possibility of action - in ways small or large - we let God move in us, arousing our awareness, awakening our gratitude and compassion, moving us to do our part to insure the healthy evolution of our living home, the Earth.

You may be seated. . . Breathe deeply . . . relax. . . and enjoy . . .

⁴ Music selections are done by a group of performers. Other songs or hymns may be substituted. See song list on page 12 for suggestions.

⁵ Chant and closing hymn are done by everyone present, including congregation. Songsheet is provided on page 11; sources for chant and hymn are on page 12.

1. Prayers for Spirit

Chant - *O Great Spirit*

Talk (leader) - "In the beginning, God . . ." "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God . . ." Travel back to the beginning, before you were born, before the Earth was formed, before our sun was a star, before the beginning of time . . . In the beginning there was only God, Spirit, Infinite Potential. It's out of this that all that is was created. It's from this emptiness, nothingness, the void, that creation began. Look around . . . it's the expression of Spirit that you see . . . breathe . . . it's the breath of God that you breathe. Just be . . . It's Infinite Presence in which you live and move and have being.

Music (all) - *Oyaheya*

Prayer (reader 1) - Most Holy God, Spirit of all life, we thank you for the unfolding universe. We feel your Holy Spirit now and always, guiding and protecting, growing and expanding, leading and supporting the continuing outreaching expansion of creation. Your guiding Spirit is woven into this expanding creation, with us always. Your Spirit inspires and protects us. It is you, Sweet Spirit, that is the power around us, beside us, in front of us, behind us. . . . and within us, forever in our midst. Amen.

Silence

2. Prayers for Fire

Chant - *O Great Spirit*

Talk (leader) - And God said, "Let there be light . . ." and there was light . . . brilliant fire bursting into being, spinning, turning, sooting, driving in all directions . . . light and heat swirling into molten mas. . . particles purified in the heat, spinning, red hot, off on their own. That which had not been, now is . . . fire, shining in the darkness.

Music (women) - *Fire*

Prayer (reader 2) - O Great Mystery, This world is cold and dark. Would that there be some light and warmth. And the stars did shine in the heavens, the sun and moon hung high, and there was fire. We sit now at God's hearth. We sit with light in the darkness, with heat in the cold. The flames are bright, golden and red. The embers bake our food. O Creator, we are grateful for the gift of fire. Amen

Silence

3. Prayers for The Water

Chant - *O Great Spirit*

Talk (leader) - That which now is, expands and becomes a Universe . . . expanding, growing, stretching out into the unknown. Galaxies of fire burn up and cool down, bits and parts spin off and come together. Molecules of hydrogen and oxygen find each other, merging into water, swirling oceans of water spinning around the firey stars, water hissing and spitting, cooling

and becoming still.

Music (solo) - *River Song*

Prayer (reader 3) - Divine Spirit, We thank you for creating water – rain and snow – flowing movement, turbulent, pouring, soft, smooth. Nurture the world, oh God, with running streams and great oceans. Slake the thirst of this planet. Water to drink, sweet, pure and fresh. Water to bathe, clean. Water to nourish. We give thanks for the gracious and abundant blessings of water.

Silence

4. Prayers for Earth

Chant - *O Great Spirit*

Talk (leader) - Around one small star, the liquid masses spin and begin to cool . . . and solid earth emerges from the deeps. Earth - land – mountains, valleys, rocks, plains, sand, clay, dirt . . . the rich ground on which we stand – holy ground – the home that we call Earth, hugs us to itself.

Music (men) - *Guardians of the Earth*

Prayer (reader 4) - O, Great Spirit of the Earth, when the world was constant movement, you created water and fire to clash and solidify into solid ground. In your fertile soil, we plant ourselves knowing that all the nutrients we need are always available; knowing that as we grow in your expression, we are embraced by the nurturing Earth. Amen

Silence

5. Prayers for Air

Chant - *O Great Spirit*

Talk (leader) - The Earth breathes and an atmosphere is formed. Air. An invisible covering that protects the surface of the earth – shielding it from the rays of the sun, holding heat to its bosom, capturing evaporating moisture and sending it back to the Earth as rain or sleet or snow. Precious Air. That which is unseen, yet essential for the life that is to come.

Music (duet) - *Wings*

Prayer (reader 5) - Oh Great Mystery, In the stillness, you, God, breathed into the void and created clean, pure air – the breath of life needed by all living things. Let us take a moment now to be aware of our breath – the inflow of clean, pure air. We are reminded to be grateful for the very gift of God's breath – air. Amen

Silence

6. Prayers for Life

Chant - *O Great Spirit*

Talk (leader) - Everything is ready – creation is infused with Spirit. Everything is in place – fire, water, earth, air. The conditions are right. In the dark depths of the oceans, life is born . . . very small at first, growing, splitting, changing, evolving . . . emerging out of the water, moving onto land. A smorgasboard of shapes and forms come into being – plants, trees, flowers – fish, birds, insects, animals – quadrupeds and bipeds – It's as if the Earth itself is alive. And then a human being emerges - living, breathing, thinking, choosing, running, dancing, dreaming. Greater potential than ever before – and greater danger.

Music (all) - *Listen*

Prayer (reader 6) - Creator of all life, from your creation of fire, water, earth and air springs forth our lives - the surge to grow, move, change. We plant our feet on Mother Earth and pull up the water of life through our roots. We breathe the air and stretch our limbs out toward the light. Our lives are ever emerging and always seeking to return to you, O gracious God.

Amen

Silence

7. Prayers for Oneness

Chant - *O Great Spirit*

Talk (leader) - From before the beginning through the Mysteries of Spirit, and the creation of fire, water, earth, air and life itself, our Universe has evolved. From the void to the human being, from very simple to unbelievably complex, we stand together at the edge of what is to come. We have the power to destroy it all. And we have the God-given power, the evolving consciousness, to birth dreams and miracles, life and possibility, goodness, beauty, a higher truth, a world in which kindness and compassion rule and all life is respected and nurtured. What touches one, touches all. We are One. We are Unity.

Music (duet) - *I Am*

Prayer (reader 7) - Loving God, Eternal Presence, hear our prayer of praise at the wonderment of the wholeness of your creation of which we are part. We give thanks for being united with you, with each other and with our world. All is in accord with your perfect will. Express that will thru us Lord, that we may nurture this world and each other, and in so doing ourselves.

Amen.

Silence

FINALE (all) – *Look at the World*

BENEDICTION (leader)

CLOSING HYMN (everyone) – *Blue Green Hills of Earth*

Closing Hymn:

BLUE GREEN HILLS OF EARTH

For the earth forever turning,
For the skies, for every sea,
For our lives, for all creation,
Sing we our joyful praise to Thee.

For the mountains, hills and pastures
In their silent majesty;
For all life, for all of nature
Sing we our joyful praise to Thee.

For the sun, for rain and thunder,
For the land that makes us free;
For the stars, for all the heavens,
Sing we our joyful praise to Thee.

For the earth forever turning,
For the skies, for every sea,
To our God we sing returning
Home to our blue green hills of earth.

SOURCES FOR SONGS:

Group Chants and Hymns:

"The Heart of the World" chant by Linda Webb-Khakaba, email: musikwmn1@aol.com

"O Great Spirit" Native American chant from *Circle of Song* (Amherst, MA: Full Circle Press, 1995)

"Blue Green Hills of Earth" from Paul Winter's *Missa Gaia*

Suggested Songs for Solos:

"Fire" arranged by Mary Goetze and published by Boosey and Hawkes

"Guardians of the Earth" by Michael & Jill Gallina, Shawnee Press, Inc.

"Hold Me in Your Arms, Mother Earth" words & music by Lois J. Henrickson, arranged by Stephen Jacob

"Holy Ground" by Christopher Beatty, Cherry Lane Music Publishing

"Oyaheya" by Rickie Beckwith Beyers (Agape International)

"Mother Earth Chant" by Leslie Lightfall

"Song for Mother Earth" Native American Chant, arranged by Lana Walter

"Take These Wings" words by Steve Kupferschmid, music by Don Besig, Shawnee Press, Inc.

"Wings" by Carl Strommen, published by Alfred Press