SEASON OF CREATION 2020
“Jubilee for the Earth: New Rhythms, New Hope.”
1 September – 4 October
Introduction to this resource

From September to October each year the Christian Community celebrates the Season of Creation by praying and acting together to protect our common home. It begins on 1 September, the World Day of Prayer for Creation. As followers of Christ from around the globe, we share a common role as caretakers of God’s creation. We see that our well-being is interwoven with its wellbeing.

The theme of this year’s Season of Creation is Jubilee for the Earth: New Rhythms, New Hope. We are invited to consider the integral relationship between rest for the Earth and ecological, economic, social and political ways of living. The far-reaching effects of the global pandemic, COVID-19 has shown us of the need for just and sustainable systems.

This resource, along with many other available on-line, is to support our desire to engage with this Season of Creation. It offers Scripture, Prayers, the opportunity for individual and group reflection (albeit via Teams or Zoom) and some actions which we may consider as part of our commitment to working for the protection of our world.

Apart from week one which starts our journey on 1 September with the World Day of Prayer for Creation the resource follows the Sundays of September up until Sunday 4 October, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

It is suggested that you begin your time of prayer and reflection by creating a prayerful space, by lighting a candle and having a moment of silence before beginning.

At the end of the prayer time there are some points for action so that we can take our prayer into the heart of our everyday lives.
The Introduction to the Missal is a rich source of theology. The entire Eucharistic celebration is planned in such a way that it leads to conscious, active and full participation of the faithful. In body and in mind believers can burn with faith, hope, and charity. Believers remember the loving kindness of God as they use material things in prayerful actions to convey sacred mysteries - signs and symbols. The water of baptism and oils of anointing; bread and wine bringing spiritual nourishment: these are all gifts of Earth and work of human hands.

Today, we celebrate the grace of God loving us into existence and giving Earth as our home. In our time of prayer this week we are encouraged, by our Sunday Readings, to reflect on God’s merciful love and invitation we are offered to respond in the same way to those who have offended us. The capacity to forgive and be forgiven is necessary if cycles of violence are to be broken. We do not have to do this alone. The love which God has for us also brings forgiveness and the chance to renew our relationships with one another and with our world.

Invitation to Prayer © David Adam – The Rhythm of Life SPCK 1996

To God the Father, who created the world;
To God the Son, who redeemed the world;
To God the Holy Spirit, who sustains the world;
Be all praise and glory, now and for ever. Amen

Pause

Awaken us to your glory, Lord,
dispel the darkness of the night
Destroy our heaviness of heart
Cure the blindness of our sight
Heal the deafness of our ears
Open the mouth that is dumb
Restore a gentleness of touch
Encourage in us a sense of longing
Bring to us an awareness of you.
Awaken us to your glory, Lord.

Psalm 103 © Jerusalem Bible

The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy

My soul, give thanks to the Lord,
    all my being, bless his holy name
My soul, give thanks to the Lord
    and never forget all his blessings.

It is he forgives all your guilt
    who heals every one of your ills,
who redeems your life from the grave,
    who crowns you with love and compassion.

His wrath will come to an end,
    he will not be angry for ever.
He does not treat us according to our sins
    nor repay us according to our faults.

For as the heavens are high above the earth
    so strong is his love for those who fear him.
As far as the east is from the west
    so far does he remove our sins.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 18:21-35 (NRSV)

Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.
“For this reason, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So, the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Pause for quiet reflection –

An extract from the words of Pope Francis
(Bishops’ Conference of France on Laudato Si, 3 September 2020)

We are part of a single human family, called to live in a common house whose disturbing degradation we see together. The current health crisis in humanity reminds us of our fragility. We understand how close we are to each other, inserted into a world of which we share the future, and that mistreating it can only lead to serious consequences, not only environmental, but also social and human.
The Bible teaches us that the world was not born of chaos or chance, but from a decision of God who called it and always calls it to existence, out of love. The universe is beautiful and good, its contemplation allows us to glimpse the infinite beauty and goodness of its Author. Each creature, even the most ephemeral, is the object of the Father’s tenderness which gives him a place in the world. The Christian can only respect the work that his Father entrusted to him as a garden to cultivate, to protect, to develop in its potential. And if man has the right to use nature for his own purposes, he cannot, in any way, believe the owner or the despot, but only the steward who will be held accountable for his management. In this garden that God offers us, men are called to live in harmony in justice, peace and brotherhood, an evangelical ideal proposed by Jesus (cf. LS, 82). And when we consider nature only as an object of profit and interest - a vision that consolidates the arbitrariness of the strongest - then harmony is broken and serious inequalities, injustices and sufferings appear.

Thus, “if the ecological crisis is the outbreak, an external manifestation of an ethical, cultural, spiritual crisis, we cannot claim to heal our relationship to nature without sanitizing all the fundamental relationships of the human being” (LS, 119). There will therefore be no new relationship with nature without a new human being, and it is by healing the heart of man that one can hope to cure the world of its social and environmental disorders.

Dear friends, I renew my encouragement in your efforts to safeguard the environment. While the state of the planet may seem catastrophic and some situations even seem irreversible, we Christians always keep hope, for we have our eyes turned to Jesus Christ. He is God, the Creator himself, who came to visit his creation and live among us (cf. LS nn. 96-100), in order to heal us, to restore us to the harmony we have lost, harmony with our brethren, harmony with nature. “He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, because he has definitively united with our land, and his love always leads us to find new paths” (LS, 245).

Reflection Questions – spend some time as a group or as an individual reflecting on the questions below or any of the words presented here.

- Which of the words of Pope Francis resonate with you most? Why?
- In what ways do our personal relationships promote harmony? Are there some relationships in my own life which need healing?
- What aspects of COVID-19 have highlighted for you how closely related we are to one another? In what ways have we/I been able to respond to the crisis in our/my own communities?

Merciful God,
forgive us when we fail you,
Forgive us when we forget what we owe you – our very lives.
Forgive us when we neglect the duty we owe others – our every love.
Forgive us when we reject the responsibility we owe the earth – our total care.
Forgive us when we rest concerned about ourselves
and ignore the needs around us: in others and in the environment.

Forgive us, we pray, and free us to be
evermore faithful followers of your Son, our Lord,
evermore compassionate carers in his name,
evermore good stewards of the rich bounty of creation.
Amen.

**Actions – some ways that this week we can help our Common Home**

We are reminded of the value of community and the importance of each of us striving
to protect our lives together. During this *Season of Creation* we are called to look at
those things that we all depend on, and which promote our health and well-being.
Things such as the air, the oceans, open spaces.

This week let us consider travel – even in this time of a global pandemic - do we
walk/cycle for shorter journeys, take public transport for longer journeys; when it is
safe to do so. If driving, do we reduce our speed, use gears rather than braking, turn
off the engine when idling? When the pandemic is over, and we are freer to travel –
will we rethink our use of air travel? These things reduce our contribution to the
pollution of the air we all breathe.

How much thought do we give to our use of plastics which may well end up in the sea
or dumped in poorer nations’ open spaces? Let us avoid plastic packaging for food;
drink unbottled water; replace disposable wipes/napkins with fabric, avoid plastic
plates, cutlery etc.

Finally let us consider our common spaces – taking our rubbish home and picking up
litter in our streets.
Creator of Life,
At Your word, the Earth brought forth plants yielding seed and trees of every kind bearing fruit. The rivers, mountains, minerals, seas and forests sustained life.

The eyes of all looked to You to satisfy the needs of every living thing. And throughout time the Earth has sustained life. Through the planetary cycles of days and seasons, renewal and growth, you open your hand to give creatures our food in the proper time.

In your Wisdom, you granted a Sabbath; a blessed time to rest in gratitude for all that you have given; a time to liberate ourselves from vicious consumption; a time to allow the land and all creatures to rest from the burden of production.

But these days our living pushes the planet beyond its limits. Our demands for growth, and our never-ending cycle of production and consumption are exhausting our world. The forests are leached, the topsoil erodes, the fields fail, the deserts advance, the seas acidify, the storms intensify. We have not allowed the land to observe her Sabbath, and the Earth is struggling to be renewed.

During this Season of Creation, we ask you to grant us courage to observe a Sabbath for our planet. Strengthen us with the faith to trust in your providence. Inspire us with the creativity to share what we have been given. Teach us to be satisfied with enough. And as we proclaim a Jubilee for the Earth, send Your Holy Spirit to renew the face of creation.

In the name of the One who came to proclaim good news to all creation, Jesus Christ. Amen.