Staff Prayer Ritual in the week of World Environment Day: OUTLINE of Ritual

We Gather:
Welcome
Sign of the Cross
Lighting of the 3 Candles
Opening Prayer

We Listen:
Scripture Reading
Reflection
Sharing

We Respond:
Ritual Action
Closing Prayer

We Go Forth:
Blessing
Dismissal
Sign of Peace

The Environment
Ideally, set out chairs around a prayer focus – creating a space where people can be present to one another. Three candles are placed near the Bible which rests open at the Scripture Reading for today. Note: The Scripture printed here is a different translation. It is taken from “The Inclusive New Testament”. More detail below ...

You will need:

✓ a Leader of prayer; a Reader (who will read from the Bible); a second Reader for the Prayers of Intercession; person(s) to light the candles at the appropriate times in the ritual

✓ 3 candles (head, heart and hands) + matches

✓ a bowl of earth / a bowl of water / a packet of seeds: the Head Candle stands in the earth; the Heart Candle stands (or floats) in the water; the Hands Candle stands among the seeds.

✓ a Bible (open at the Reading) on a small table

✓ Handouts for each staff member

✓ Full text of the ritual for the Leader

✓ CD of music/sounds, player and a person to organise the music at the appropriate time

✓ CD with track “Deep Peace” by Bill Douglas (see ALTERNATIVE suggestion at the Sign of Peace)
Staff Prayer Ritual in the week of World Environment Day: Detail

We Gather
Welcome & Introduction
Leader: This week, we are honouring a very important treasure – the environment in which we live.

The World Environment Day slogan for 2008 is: Kick the Habit! Towards a Low Carbon Economy. Recognising that climate change is becoming the defining issue of our era, the United Nations is asking countries, companies and communities to focus on greenhouse gas emissions and how to reduce them. World Environment Day will highlight resources and initiatives that promote low carbon economies and life-styles, such as improved energy efficiency, alternative energy sources, forest conservation and eco-friendly consumption.

The point is to give a human face to environmental issues; empower people to become active agents of sustainable and equitable development; promote an understanding that communities are pivotal to changing attitudes towards environmental issues; and advocate partnership, which will ensure all nations and peoples enjoy a safer and more prosperous future.

Sign of the Cross
Leader: We begin our prayer with the Sign of the Cross - the Cross which (in Australia) shines faithfully in our night sky.
All: In the name of the Father, + and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Suggestion:
A CD of Nature sounds (birdsong / water / relaxation music / etc) could be ‘faded up’ as the Lighting of the Candles begins ... the person responsible for the music would ‘fade down’ (but not out) each time the Leader speaks during this Candles lighting ceremony. At the end, just fade out completely and allow the CD to continue silently rather than have the sound of a machine click. If the music is consistently relaxing in mood, or the birdsong, etc continues throughout the CD, then it can be ‘faded up’ at any appropriate time later in the prayer – eg, after the Scripture Reading when there is a slight pause to reflect ...

Lighting of the 1st Candle (Head Candle)
Leader: We invite the presence of God, the Creative Source, to enliven our minds as we light the first of our three candles. With this fire, let us remember the Earth that grounds us and on which we have built our homes ...

A person lights the ‘Earth ‘ candle which is set in a bowl of earth ... music (or Nature sounds) fades up while this happens and Leader gives a slight PAUSE while all welcome God’s presence into the Earth.

Lighting of the 2nd Candle (Heart Candle)
Leader: We ask Jesus, who began his ministry in the waters of the Jordan, to energise our hearts in outreach to those who struggle and need our help. With this candle, we honour the Water that refreshes us and satisfies our thirst ...

A person lights the candle standing (or floating) in the bowl of water ... music (or Nature sounds) fades up while this happens and Leader gives a slight PAUSE while all welcome Jesus to be present in all the waterways and oceans of the world.

Lighting of the 3rd Candle (Hands Candle)
Leader: Come Holy Spirit, blow the breath of grace throughout our classrooms today and influence all that we do with our hands today. With this flame, we reverence the Air that we breathe ...

A person lights the candle standing in a bowl of seeds ... music (or Nature sounds) fades up while this happens and Leader gives a slight PAUSE while all invite the Spirit to move throughout the atmosphere of the world.
Opening Prayer
Leader: Let us pray ...
All: God of the sun and moon, of the mountains, deserts and plains,
    God of the mighty oceans, of rivers, lakes and streams,
    God of all creatures that live and move on this sacred Earth,
    we are formed by Christ into your people
    called to bring the world into your marvellous light.
    May we know our ecological vocation
    so that we will care for this earth which you have created.
    We ask this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer adapted from ‘Ecological Conversion’ in Spirited – Prayers for Young People (Brisbane WYD Secretariat) page 26

We Listen
Scripture Reading
Reader 1: Psalm 8
    Lord our God, the whole world tells the greatness of your name.
    Your glory reaches beyond the stars.
    Even the babble of infants declares your strength,
    your power to halt the enemy and avenger.
    I see you handiwork in the heavens:
    the moon and the stars you set in place.
    What is humankind that you remember them,
    the human race that you care for them?
    You treat them like gods, dressing them in glory and splendour.
    You give them charge of the earth, laying all at their feet:
    cattle and sheep, wild beasts, birds of the sky, fish of the sea,
    every swimming creature.

All: Lord our God, the whole world tells the greatness of your name.

SHORT PAUSE ...

Reflection
Reader 2: How remarkable the creativity of the world about us!
    Nature never repeats itself, not in the animal or in the plant world; not in the
    snowflakes or the raindrops; not in its geological structures or in any of its daily
    displays throughout the observable world. These are all voices of the Earth – spirit
    voices seeking from us understanding and response.

Reader 3: Our primary response from the human world is admiration – admiration that is also
    adoration, since each living being presents to us some unique aspect of the divine
    mystery whence all things emerge into being. How glorious to us the sunrise and
    sunset, the clouds drifting across the sky! How divine the song of the wood thrush!
    As Brian Swimme has expressed it, “The universe shivers with wonder in the depths
    of the human.”

Reader 4: In understanding the vast web of interrelations between all natural phenomena
    – the flow of energy whereby each reality sustains and is sustained by all other
    realities in the entire world – we come to true wisdom.

Thomas Berry, January 1990, in the FOREWORD of To Honour the Earth by Dorothy MacLean.
Sharing
Leader: What response do these Readings (Psalm 8 and the extract from Thomas Berry) awaken within you?

*People may like to share for a few minutes ...*

We Respond
Ritual Action
Leader: As the Spirit of God breathes Life into the world, take this seed as a symbol of all the life it contains.

Plant it in your own heart so that you will bloom and bring life and possibility into every new situation ...

Let this seed remind you to nourish and care for the Earth, to conserve and respect Nature, and to cherish this wonderful Universe, our home.

*Leader now gives a seed to each participant ...*

Closing Prayer
Leader: Let us pray ...

All: Living God,
You reveal your great love through the beauty of Nature.
Help us to love and respect our world.
May we be ‘seeds’ for growth, raising awareness of the Sacred, and teaching all to see and treasure your print in the gift of Creation.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen.

We Go Forth
Blessing
Leader: May God, Source of Life,
bless all of Creation with renewed and sustainable Energy for Life.

All: Amen.
Leader: May Jesus, Living Water,
pour out healing grace on all who thirst for true Life.
All: Amen.
Leader: May God’s Spirit, Breath of Love,
fill every corner of the earth with respect and reverence for Life.
All: Amen.
Leader: May almighty God bless us,
the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit.
All: Amen.

Dismissal
Leader: Go from here to be seeds of new Life for our world!
All: Thanks be to God!
Sign of Peace
Leader: Today, as a Sign of Peace, let us close our eyes
and reach out in silent connection to the Earth -
sending peace and healing to wherever it is needed ...

All spend 30 seconds or so in silent connection with the Earth.

ALTERNATIVELY: If there is time, play the song by Bill Douglas “Deep Peace” which is available on his album
Eternity’s Sunrise and also to be found on the ABC’s Swoon Series. This song is based on a Celtic Blessing of Peace –
beautifully crafted both in text and in music.

Glory and praise for ever!

Dan 3:52

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