Session Five

Living in Harmony with Mother Earth

Isaiah 24:3-5; Jeremiah 12:10, 11, 13

Leader Background and Nurture

The Circle of Creation
We are part of a circle. The circle is large and full of life. Creator God created creation for each of us. The circle of creation is where we live. The Earth is our Mother, and all is connected to the Earth. The Earth has been given a mission, and the mission is to sustain life.

Each day we use the resources that have been granted to us without giving it much thought. We create garbage and waste and have become careless in our actions, producing and supporting a way of life that contributes to the ongoing destruction instead of stopping it. It has become simple for us to throw our waste into the garbage or ground and not give it much thought.

When this becomes our way of life, the Earth Mother’s heart becomes weak. She groans because of our thoughtless actions. We are called to live in harmony and with respect for creation and all our relations that share this scared space. We are becoming more aware; we are learning to change this behaviour. When we become more mindful of our actions and walk on this earth with respect and humility, then we can heal our Mother the Earth.

Consider Your Own Cultural Traditions and Community Stories
There are many different cultures that recognize the importance of preserving our resources. The Native ancestors were aware of the importance of preserving our resources. They would not stay in one place when the resources were being over-consumed; they would move on to a different area so that the resources would have time to be replenished.

Think about the issues and questions your students might have:
• How can we be mindful of our actions towards the destruction of the Earth?
• How do the biblical and Traditional stories connect?
• Do you feel comfortable about connecting biblical and Traditional stories?

Read the Biblical Story (Isaiah 24:3-5; Jeremiah 12:10, 11, 13)
Read the biblical story from a modern version of the Bible. As you read these passages, think about what the passages are saying. What are your questions as you read the passages? What are your concerns? Do you believe the earth is going to go through a purifying state at some time, in some way? Will the ozone layer diminish to nothing and the sun become too hot for any life to
live? How can you be mindful of your actions towards the destruction that is occurring on Mother Earth?

We, as stewards of the earth, should take responsibility for our actions so we may change our ways. How will you help children not to be frightened or feel hopeless by this brokenness? How will you help them find ways to preserve, not destroy life? How might we all become more responsible for our actions so that all children may have a good and safe future for themselves and their children?

Consider the Children who will be in Church Today

What issues or concerns might the children bring with them? How might you give them time and space to voice those concerns, especially their concerns about the earth and its future? How might you help them feel empowered by the future—to take responsibility, to be good stewards of the earth, and so contribute with their community to the healing of the earth?

Preparing for the Session

1. Prepare a table with a cloth as an altar near the front of the worship space. Place a worship candle(s) and Bible on the table along with nature objects. Children might go outdoors to collect objects of nature to place on the table during the Celebrate time.

2. Pre-cut nature symbols out of construction paper and/or provide yarn and uncut paper to make name tags.

3. Gather the necessary materials for the storytelling and prayers. You will need:
   • Bible (modern version) or a child’s story Bible.
   • Story Card 5.

4. You may need (depending on activity choices):
   • Nature objects or pictures for “Connecting to Mother Earth” activity (page 75)
   • Large bristol board circle, markers, crayons, magazines, glue for the “Circle Mural”
   • Recycle, Reuse, Reduce bristol board signs
   • Activity Sheet 2 and recyclable items: bottles, wood sticks, cans, dried beans, rice, small pebbles to make a musical band
   • Materials for a clean-up day project: garbage bags, boots, gloves for each person, recycling container
   • Tree(s), shovels, water for tree planting
   • Materials to make a bird feeder: plastic pop bottles or bleach bottles (cleaned), knife to cut bottle, string to hang the feeder
   • Paper to make plans to visit a recycling plant
   • Activity Sheet 1 (older children/youth/adults)
   • Activity Sheet 3.
Gathering
Welcome each child and/or family as they arrive. Have available crayons, pencil crayons, and paper for name tags, on a low table. Invite each child to make a name tag of something special from Mother Earth. Or have precut nature name tags available, e.g. flowers, animals, sun, moon, water. Attach yarn to the name tags.

Lighting of the Christ Candle
Ask one of the children or a family to light the Christ candle on the worship table as the worship begins.

Call to Worship
One: Praise the Creator.
All: Eternal God, you are great indeed.
One: You clothe yourself with light like a garment.
All: You cover the earth with all your wonders.
One: Creator God, how many are your works!
All: With wisdom at your side, you made them all, the earth is full of your creatures.
One: All these look to you to give them their food in due season.
All: What you give them they gather up when you open your hand.
You fill them with good things.
One: May your praise, O God, endure forever.
All: We will praise you, Creator God, forever.
(Revised from Voices United, Psalm 104 pg. 826.)

Song
“This is God’s Wondrous World” (Voices United #296)
“Take off your Shoes” (Spirit of Singing #69)
“This is the Day” (VU #412)
“Morning Has Broken” (VU #409)

Prayer
Creator God, we thank you for the earth and all the resources that are granted to us each day. Through your guiding hands, help us to be aware of our environment and may we learn to always live with respect in creation. We praise you through our days, thankful for all that has been created for us, thankful for your divine Love that sweeps across the earth cradling us and creating with a mother’s care. We come before you with thankful hearts... May your will be done in our lives... Amen.
Tell The Story

(Children are present with the congregation or in their own children’s group.)

Tell The Story

Biblical Story (Isaiah 24:3-5; Jeremiah 12:10, 11, 13)

Explain to the congregation that the following passages come from the Hebrew scriptures or Old Testament part of our Bible. Two prophets who lived long ago told what might happen if people polluted and trampled on the earth and didn’t care about what happened to the Sacred Circle of life. Invite two readers, perhaps a youth and an Elder, to read from Isaiah 24:3-5 and Jeremiah 12:10, 11, 13.

What are these passages teaching us? How can we take the wisdom of the prophets and use it in a good way now?

Contemporary Story

Using Story Card 5, share the story “Learning about the Dump” and/or “The Circle of Creation.” What can we learn about our actions and the result of them? What might we do to change our ways and be good stewards of the earth now? You might wish to talk about the 3 Rs—reuse, recycle, and reduce—and why it is important to remember them to help replenish the earth. To do this you might have placards (signs on sticks) available. As you lift up a sign for each of the 3 Rs, ask the participants what they might do or are already doing to honour these values. Lift up the “reuse sign” and ask, “What things can we reuse?” Then lift up the “recycle sign” and ask, “What things does your family recycle?” Then hold up the “reduce sign” and ask, “What does it mean to reduce?” Talk about: What might we do to reduce the amount of things we take from the environment? Why is it difficult to think about doing with less?

Older children/youth or adults may wish to look at Activity Sheet 1 “Why Do We Call the Earth our Mother?”

Song

“For the Beauty of the Earth” (Voices United #226)
“We are Marching in the Light of God” (VU #646)
“The Garbage Round” (Spirit of Singing #50)

(Children leave for a time of children’s activities in their own group, either in the sanctuary or in a separate space.)
Connect
to the Story

(Children are in their own Sunday school or other church group.)

This is a time that you can help the children understand their own connection with Mother Earth and connect to Traditional values of living in harmony with all creatures within the Sacred Circle. It is important for the children to understand that our actions have a consequence. We may not see the fruits of our action right away, but in time, if the destruction of the earth is not addressed, we will reap what we sow.

During activity time talk about the connection of all life within the Sacred Circle. Share that whatever action one takes within the Sacred Circle affects everyone and everything else in the circle. We must learn to live in harmony with Mother Earth and her creatures by carefully using, recycling, and replenishing the earth. Talk about actions we can take to renew the earth and bring about healing in our thoughts, words, and actions.

Check-in

Celebrate birthdays and other important occasions that the children are happy to share with the group. Provide opportunities for children to share some other news or story from home — something happy, sad or exciting. Affirm and respect the issues and feelings children bring to the group.

Connecting to Mother Earth

Share that today we are going to think about Mother Earth and how we might live in harmony with all her creatures. Have several objects or nature pictures available. Invite each person to choose a favourite object or picture. Then go around the circle, saying, “Thank you Creator for....” Or go on a nature walk to collect nature items such as rocks, leaves, sticks, cones. Note: Be sure not to pick living things.

For separate Sunday School, Midweek Groups or Vacation Bible School: tell the contemporary story, “Learning About the Dump,” and “The Circle of Creation” (Jeremiah 12:10,11, 13) from Story Card 5.

Sharing the Stories

Contemporary Story

(Re)tell the story “Learning about the Dump.” Perhaps two or three children might read parts of the story from Story Card 5. Share: How many of you recycle at home? Why do you think it is important to recycle? What does it mean to be “a good steward” of Mother Earth? How might we all do this?

Introduce the 3 Rs— reduce, reuse, and recycle—and talk about why it is important to remember them to help to care for and replenish the earth. To do this you might have large bristol board signs available with the words reduce, reuse, and recycle. As you hold up the signs, ask the children what they might do in each category to take better care of Mother Earth. (Older children/youth may use Activity Sheet 1.)
Biblical Story (Jeremiah 12:10, 11, 13; Isaiah 24:3-5)
Invite two older children to (re-)read the biblical passages (Isaiah 24:3-5, and Jeremiah 12:10, 11, 13). Share that these passages were written long ago by two prophets who were concerned about how the earth was being trampled and destroyed and nobody cared. The prophets believed that if this continued the people would plant, but nothing would grow on Mother Earth.

Talk about: Where do we see the earth being destroyed today? Why should we care?
Talk about: What might we do to change our ways and help to restore and replenish the earth.

Activity Choices
(Any age group or all age groups together could participate in these activities. Perhaps groups could be formed according to the interests of the participants rather than by age.)

Mother Earth Activities
Nature Excursion
Go on a nature walk to collect nature items such as rocks, twigs, leaves, cones. On returning, talk about why these items are important to Mother Earth. Why do we need rocks, plants, animals? What if all the plants or animals died? What would happen to Mother Earth? Plan to place the nature objects on the altar during the Celebrate time.

Circle Mural
Materials: large bristol board circle; markers or crayons, magazines, glue.
Invite the participants to complete the large circle mural to show how everything lives in harmony on Mother Earth. Children can draw pictures or find magazine pictures of the earth’s creatures: trees, water, air, plants, animals, and people, and place them in the circle. An alternative might be for children to work together in small groups to make posters, using magazine pictures or slogans, entitled “Save Our Forests,” “Take Care of the Animals.” They might share their mural or posters in worship. Talk about:
• What happens to fish when we pollute the water?
• What happens to birds and animals when we destroy or pollute their homes?
• What happens to people when the water, air, and land are polluted?

Wants and Needs
(older children/youth)
Materials: paper, pencils.
Invite participants to make a list of things they are wishing for. Then make a list of things they really need to live. Invite them to share their lists in the learning circle. Then talk about: How might we balance our wants and needs to better live in harmony with Mother Earth, to enable all people on earth to share equally of the earth’s resources? Help them prioritize their lists to choose things that are most life-giving.
Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Materials: Story Card 5, markers, crayons.

Remember the three Rs: reduce, reuse, recycle? Talk about how might we use the three Rs at home. Where might we use them in our community? Draw pictures or write words in the boxes on Story Card 5 to share your ideas. Circle at least one activity you plan to do at home or in your community this week. Then colour the boxes.

A Recyclable Musical Band

Materials: Activity Sheet 2; recyclable items from home such as bottles, wooden sticks, cans, whatever else you may think will make a music instrument; dried beans, rice, small pebbles or sticks.

Create a lively musical piece with your musical instruments. (See Activity Sheet 2 for instructions.) You might use the band to accompany a children’s song, e.g. “When the saints come marching in,” “Jesus bids us shine” or a song of your choice.

Community Action Activities

Clean-up Day

Materials: garbage bags; boots; gloves for each person; possibly recycling container.

Plan a clean-up day for your churchyard, park, or your community (children under eight-years old need to be accompanied by an adult). Caution participants about needles.

Plan when/where you will clean up and arrange a rain date. Form teams and plan ahead to see how many adults you will need to accompany the children. Make a list of the clothing and items you will need. Think about recycling what has been gathered. Ask for a volunteer to pick up garbage after you have collected the garbage. After clean-up, have a pot-luck to celebrate your success. Be safe and have fun.

Replenish Mother Earth

Materials: trees, shovels, water to water trees after planting.

Perhaps some local nursery will donate trees. Or maybe someone will want to buy a tree in memory of a loved one. Children could think of ways to raise money for trees, e.g. bake sale, washing cars, “penny” sales.

Birdfeeder

Materials: plastic pop bottles or (cleaned) bleach bottles, a knife to cut the bottle (used by adult), plain string to hang the feeder.

Cut a hole in the side of the bottle. Put seeds into container. Hang on a tree branch in an appropriate place. And watch the birds come!

Visit a Recycling Plant

(older children/youth)

Plan to take a trip to the recycling plant. This will have to be planned in advance. You could ask for volunteers from the congregation. During the visit, invite the children/youth to think about living in harmony with the earth and the blessings that could be reaped. Also, think about “walking in balance” with our wants and needs.

For the “Recyclable Musical Band,” bring extra pre-washed items for those who might forget.
Session Five

Celebrate and Live the Story

(Children are with the congregation.)

Love, wisdom, courage, respect, humility, truth, and generosity are the seven Traditional teachings.

Generosity

Offering
Our time of offering is when we give to God for all God has given to us. We can give our time, money, or use our talents to help our church family and community. Perhaps we can give something that we have made in our activity time, such as the circle mural or posters. Our gift is a gift from us to our Creator God for all that God has given and will give us.

Prayers of the People
We can ask in the gathering if there is anyone who is in need of prayer or if there is something that the community is facing that as a congregation we should include in our prayers. Perhaps there is a great success, something we should be thankful for.

In closing our prayer together, we might sing the Lord’s Prayer (VU #959 and #960; Songs for a Gospel People #10 or #12).

Song
“God of the Sparrow” (VU #229)

Closing Prayer
Loving and caring God, we are thankful for all that You have given and will give us. You give us all we need and more. May our thoughts and actions be acceptable to you. We feel your loving Presence all around us. Amen.

Song
“Go Now in Peace” (VU #964)

Make sure that Story Card 5 and Activity Sheets go home with the children.

Love, wisdom, courage, respect, humility, truth, and generosity are the seven Traditional teachings.

Generosity

A Litany of Thanksgiving
(See Activity Sheet 3.)

A Litany of the Circle
(See Activity Sheet 3.)
Why Do We Call the Earth our Mother?

First Nations peoples believe that the earth is our Mother. Why do we call the earth our Mother? Native peoples have an inner understanding that we are all connected. The earth, moon, stars, trees, rocks, waters, sky, animals, birds, fish, insects are all connected by the same Spirit of the Creator, for the Creator has created all life and breathed life into all. Therefore, we all are considered family. In the Bible, it is taught that Creator God formed the first human from the earth and from the earth we came. As a woman gives birth to a child, the earth also gives birth to us. As a mother nurtures her offspring, so the earth nurtures us on our earth walk.

As our human mothers nurture our well-being, so does our Earth Mother; she has been given a mission to nurture our spirits. May you feel the love for the earth and respect and care for her as a child cares for her mother. My hope is that you will look at the earth with a new perspective—she is alive and cares for you each day. She does not forget about you; may you not forget about her.

Great Spirit
whose dry lands thirst, help us to find a way to refresh your lands.
We pray for your power to refresh your lands.

Great Spirit
whose waters are choked with debris and pollution, help us to find a way to cleanse your waters.
We pray for your knowledge to find the way to cleanse the waters.

Great Spirit,
whose beautiful earth grows ugly with misuse, help us to find the way to restore beauty to your handiwork.
We pray for your strength to restore the beauty of your handiwork.

Great Spirit,
whose gifts to us are being lost in selfishness and corruption, help us to find the way to restore our humanity.
We pray for your wisdom to find the way to restore our humanity.

Prayers for Mother Earth
We pray for love of Mother Earth because she is the foundation of human survival. So we must keep her pollution free for those who will travel after us.
Protect her water, air, soil, trees, forest, plants, and animals.
Do not just take and waste resources, make it a priority to conserve.
The land is given to us by the Creator to care for, not to own.
If we take care of the land, the land will take care of us.
Help us love and respect Mother Earth.

Making Musical Instruments

Drums
Use the largest coffee can that can be found. Tap the bottom of the empty can with a wooden spoon to make a steel drum-style sound. Put a plastic lid on the can, and tap it for a softer sound. You can also use a large juice can, or similar container. Cut off the lid, and cut out a square of heavy plastic sheeting and place over the top. Use a thick rubber band to keep the plastic in place.

Shakers
Shakers can be made from any sort of empty container with a lid. Fill the container with dried peas, rice, beans, pasta, stones or beads.

Musical Spoons
Take two metal spoons of the same size and place them back to back so that the rounded sides are together. Hold the spoons loosely in one hand, with the thumb on top and three fingers underneath. Put the pointer finger of the hand holding the spoons between them, so there is a little movement. Tap the bottom spoon into the palm of the other hand, keeping the palm slightly curved. The spoons will click, and the curved palm with help to make a deeper sound.
Thanksgiving Litany

One: We are thankful to the Creator as we see that life and its cycles continue.
All: Together, we give thanks to the Creator.

One: We as people of the earth have been given a duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things.
All: We give thanks to each other as people of the earth.

One: We give thanks to our Mother the earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She continues to care for us from the beginning of time.
All: To our mother, we give thanks.

One: We give thanks to the spirit of the waters, for quenching our thirst and providing us with strength. Water is life.
All: We give thanks for life-giving water.

One: We think of all the fish life in the water. They were instructed to cleanse and purify the water. They give themselves to us as food.
All: We send thanks to the fish.

One: We turn to the vast fields of plant life. As far as the eye can see, the plants grow, working many wonders.
All: We give thanks and look forward to seeing plant life for many generations to come.

One: We turn to the food plants we harvest from the garden. Since the beginning of time, the grains, vegetables, beans, and berries have helped people and other creatures survive.
All: We send plant foods thanks for their part in the circle of life.

One: We think about the Medicine herbs of the world. From the beginning, they were instructed to take away sickness. We thank those special few who remember how to use these plants for healing.
All: We send thanks to the Medicines and to the keepers of Medicines.

One: We greet the animal life of the world and the birds. They each have their own instructions and uses. They have much to teach us. We are glad they are still here and we hope they will always be so.
All: We give joyful thanks to animals and birds.

One: We turn our thoughts to the many families of trees. Some provide us with shelter and shade, others with fruit, beauty, and other useful things. For many, a tree is seen as a symbol of peace and strength.
All: We are thankful for tree life.

One: We are thankful for the four winds. They refresh us and purify the air we breathe. They help bring the change of seasons. From the four directions, they bring us messages and give us strength.
All: Together we send our thanks to the four winds.

One: Together we send thanks to the sun, moon, and stars, who bring us light and heat and light the nighttime sky. The moon governs the movement of the ocean tide, and at night the stars map out our ways.
All: Together we send greetings and thanks to the sun, moon, and stars.

One: Together, we remember the enlightened teachers who have come to help us throughout the ages. When we forget how to live in harmony, they remind us of the way we are instructed to live as people.

All: We give thanks for caring teachers and leaders.

One: We end our greeting and thanks for all the things we have named, sending our appreciation for their part in our survival. If you can think of anyone who has been forgotten, please finish this prayer for us in your own way.

All: Together we give thanks.

A Litany of the Circle

This litany is inspired by texts attributed to Chief Seattle in 1854. During this litany we will pass around a symbol of the earth. (Have some nature symbols available, such as rocks, cups of water, pictures.)

One: Every part of this earth is sacred, All: every shining pine needle, every sandy shore,

One: every mist in the dark woods, All: every clearing and humming insect is holy.

One: The rocky crest, the juices of the meadow, the beasts, and all the people, All: all belong to the same family.

One: Teach your children that the earth is our Mother. All: Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the children of the earth.

One: The water’s murmur is the voice of our father’s father. All: We are part of the earth, and the earth is part of us.

One: The rivers are our brothers; they quench our thirst. All: The perfumed flowers are our sisters.

One: The air is precious, All: For all of us share the same breath.

One: The wind that gave our grandparents breath also receives their last sigh. All: The wind gave our children the spirit of life.

One: This we know, the earth does not belong to us; All: we belong to the earth.

One: This we know, all things are connected. All: Our God is the same God, whose compassion is equal for all.

One: For we did not weave the web of life; All: we are merely a strand in it.

One: Whatever we do to the web, All: we do to ourselves.

One: Let us give thanks for the web and the circle that connects us all. All: Thanks be to God, the God of all.


Truth