Waters of Creation
An ecumenical service of worship

These are resources and suggestions for an ecumenical service of worship that can be used in whole or in part; simply choose what you need. Use it in your regular service of worship, in a special ecumenical service, in your meetings or gatherings, or for personal reflection.

This service can also be used as part of your “KAIROS Sunday” work. See our website at www.kairosCanada.org for more information on KAIROS Sunday.

For further liturgical resources on water or other topics see the KAIROS website. See also the 2005 Peace Sunday resources for the Mennonite Central Committee of Canada; the 2006 Lenten study of the United Church of Canada; and the 2006 World Development and Relief materials (including a worship service) of the Anglican, Presbyterian and United Churches. The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace also has water reflections and liturgies available in French and English, and the 2005-06 KAIROS/CCODP resources include a faith reflection on Genesis 29: 1-8 and John 4.

Suggested scripture:
Genesis 21: 1-21
Psalm 104
John 4: 1-15
Revelation 21: 1-6

Also see page 31 for other possible texts and themes.

Suggested hymns from several denominational hymnals. Feel free to substitute, and note that some titles appear in more than one hymn book.

Common Praise (Anglican)
164 What King Would Wade
294 By the Waters of Babylon
408 Wind Upon the Waters
410 Creating God, Your Fingers Trace
415/416 All Things Bright and Beautiful
424 Sing Praise to God
540 Just as the Deer
575 Let Streams of Living Justice
578 O Healing River

Lutheran Book of Worship
362 We Plough the Fields and Scatter

Voices United (United Church)
267 Like a Mighty River Flowing
287 Wellspring of Wisdom
307 Touch the Earth Lightly
309 Para Para Pitter Pat
388 Spirit Dancing on the Water
409 Morning Has Broken
449 Crashing Waters at Creation
453 Out of Deep Unordered Water
577 I’ve Got Peace Like A River
651 Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah
710 Shall We Gather at the River
713 I See a New Heaven
858-859 By the Rivers of Babylon

A Worship Book (Mennonite)
53 God of the earth, the sky, the sea
148 By the waters (of Babylon)
372 O healing river
495 O let all who thirst
515 Jesus, rock of ages

OPENING PRAYERS

Invocation

One: Holy Spirit, Life-Giver,
Who moved over the waters of creation,
who led your people through the waters of the Red Sea to liberation,
who descended like a dove above the waters of Jesus’ baptism,
draw us together as we gather in your name, seeking replenishment for your task of repairing the world.
All: Creator God,
We thank you for your love in all creation,
Especially for your gift of water to sustain, refresh and cleanse all life.
We ask your blessing on this gathering as we come together as your people,
bringing our many stories and traditions,
mixing the waters of our experience and our faith.
May we find strength and refreshment in those waters.
Amen.

(From The Vision and Practice of Jubilee: Biblical Hopes, New Beginnings, May 2000)

Invitation to the Thirsty

Call: Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.
And you who have no money, come, buy and eat!

Response: We have spent our money on what is not bread and
our labour on what does not satisfy. But we will listen, listen to you.
We will eat what is good. We will delight in the richest of fare.

Call: Give ear and come to me. Hear me that your soul may live.
Seek the Lord while he may be found.
Call on him while he is near.

Response: We will turn from our thoughtless ways.
We will interrupt our wayward thoughts.
We will come to the Lord for mercy.
We will call to our God who freely pardons.

Call: For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord. As the light from the stars travels countless years to the dust at your feet, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Response: We will turn from our thoughtless ways.
We will interrupt our wayward thoughts.
We will come to the Lord for mercy.
We will call to our God who freely pardons.

Call: As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Response: We’ll share our wealth and our burdens and go out in joy.
We will put down our weapons and worries, and we will be led forth in peace.
We will listen to the mountains and the hills that are singing.
We will move to the rhythm of the clapping trees.
Where there is a thorn bush, we will look for a pine tree; we will wait for the myrtle where briers now grow.
We will come to the water, we who are thirsty, to meet with the empty handed there.

(Adapted from Isaiah 55 by Rebecca Spurrier, formerly of Mennonite Central Committee Ukraine: www.mcc.org/bc/worshipresource1.html)

PRAYERS/LITANIES

Prayer of Water

“Be praised my God for Sister Water who is useful, humble, precious and pure.”
As St. Francis prayed in great gratitude for Sister Water, we pray in thankfulness for her life sustaining generosity.
Oh, water, in your mysterious beauty you cause the desert to bloom.

Prayer of Confession

(Suggestion: Use a sung refrain of By the Waters of Babylon during and after the prayers of confession.)

Creator of Heaven and Earth
You who blew over the dark waters of creation
Have mercy on us who seek profit from what you offer so freely.
Forgive us, we pray, for the times we have failed to recognise our relationship with Sister Water, have not used water wisely, have not called others to awareness for the times we have thoughtlessly polluted instead of protected our water sources, and have ignored the needs of our brothers and sisters around the world.

Have mercy on us, we who forget that your gift of water is for all creation for all peoples. All nations. All lands. All creatures. All needs. Forgive us. Forgive us our greed, and forgive us for the fearfulness that keeps us from sharing your generous gifts equally with all.

Litany of Lamentation: By The Rivers

This litany focuses on the experience of Aboriginal peoples across Canada, who were systematically stripped of their land, languages, and cultural rights. In a sense, this litany is also a confession on the part of Canadian churches, which, through the residential school system, participated actively in denying Aboriginal peoples their rights. The reference to familiar rivers that flow through Aboriginal peoples’ territories reminds us that mourning has taken place along rivers in our context and time, not only alongside the “rivers of Babylon” thousands of years ago.

All: By the Red, the Grand and the Bow Rivers we sat down and wept when we remembered.

Leader: How can we remember the old ways When strangers broke and fenced our land and banned our teachings, when our children were taken from us?

All: By the North Saskatchewan, the Miramichi and the Bloodvein Rivers we sat down and wept when we remembered.

Leader: Creator God, how can we rebuild what was ground down and cast away? How can we recover the strengths of our ancestors? How can we restore balance for our children’s children? How can we live in the land made strange?

All: By the rivers of life we sit down and weep as we remember By the rivers of life, let healing and justice flow from our tears.

(Psalm adapted from Toward Justice and Reconciliation: A Beginning, The United Church of Canada, 2003)

Prayer of Assurance and Thanksgiving

One: The woman at the well wondered why Jesus was asking her for a drink. After all, she was a foreigner to him, someone to be avoided and looked down upon. His people and her people did not have a peaceful relationship. Yet Jesus said to her:

All: “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

One: Remembering your everlasting generosity towards us, Loving God, may we go forward as a forgiven people, ready to accept our brother Jesus’ promise of living water for all, forever. May we be springs of water for our thirsty neighbours and communities; may we be prepared to accept the gift of living water from each other.

All: AMEN.

Prayers of the Community

(Use what you need and feel free to adapt. Choose a short verse or chorus from one of the hymns suggested above and use it as a sung response.)

One: Creator God, we thank you that there are different paths to wholeness. We see the wonder of your creation all around us, in the singing birds and the flowing water. We give thanks for the opportunity to share, and for everything you have given us. We give thanks for connectedness to one another, for interconnectedness with the whole created world and the entire cosmos. We give thanks that you have made us part of a creation so rich and complex that our every need can be met if we live in right relationship.

(Sung response)

One: We give thanks for laughter, for humour, for the many different ways
we are able to be together and in community in this sacred place and in our day to day lives. We thank you for the global community of which we are a part, and for the amazing diversity of languages and cultures which surround us. Help us find a new appreciation for difference, knowing that you created difference and diversity out of chaos. Help us find respect for the different paths that people take. Remind us that we are in communion with you and in community with all creation.

(Sung response)

One: Give us a thirst for justice, Holy One, for we need it. Inspire us to follow Jesus’ path, and to remember the compassionate anger he showed when he saw the suffering of others. Despite the riches you have given us, many go hungry and thirsty in the midst of plenty. We do not believe this is your vision for any of us. Forgive our human failings, and prod us to find new ways of being in right relationship with all creation.

One: We remember all in the human family who suffer violence, fear and want. We bring to mind the many women and children who walk miles seeking clean water.

We remember the women who face violence because they have been away from the house too long fetching water; and anyone who faces violence in the home or the community. We mourn with all parents who have lost a child to preventable disease, or who cannot afford an education for their children.

We think of the men, women and youth everywhere who cannot find work enough to put good food and drink on the table.

We pray for all who live with HIV/AIDS, who above all need clean water, medicines, and loving support.

We pray for farmers facing bankruptcy or drought.

Forgive us when we forget the needs of others, and forget that need is caused by greed.

We remember now all in need of healing and justice, and we name those places and people now, silently or aloud.

(Sung response)

One: We remember all the parts of your creation suffering because of devastated habitat, climate change, and polluted water. Forgive us for failing to respect your creation.

One: We pray that you will help us accept responsibility for these injustices, for they are not your will. We thank you for accompanying us on the path to justice, and for giving to us prophets of all ages and traditions who show us the way to right relationship with you, each other, and your creation. We thank you for our children and elders, and the clear vision they offer.

We thank you for the leadership and energy of our youth, and their ability to show us injustice.

We thank you for everyone who works to build community.

We thank you for all who love your creation and struggle to restore it.

We thank you for all leaders everywhere who show us your face, and we name them now, silently or aloud.

(Sung response)

One: We give thanks that Jesus Christ has been in our past, is in our present, and will be with us in our future. Help us to be open to new life and to vision; to bring new life to our homes; and to be healers in our families, in our communities and in our church. May we be as living water flowing to a world thirsty for love and justice.

ALL: AMEN.

— KAIROS, with material from Dancing Sun Vol. IV, a children and adult’s resource on Aboriginal rights from the Anglican and United Churches.

Offering Prayer:

Creator God, whose Spirit moved over the face of the waters, who gathers the seas into their places and directs the courses of the rivers, who sends rain upon the earth that it should bring forth life: we praise you for the gift of water. Create in us such a sense of wonder and delight in this and all your gifts, that we might receive them with gratitude, care for them with love, and generously share them with all your creatures, to the honour and glory of your holy name. Amen

(Adapted from Miriam Therese Winter, Woman Prayer, Woman Song by Rosanne Athaide, CCODP)

BLESSING/BENEDICTIONS/CLOSINGS

God our Creator, Living Water, Source of Life, Who quenches our thirst and refreshes our weariness: Be for us always a fountain of life, and for the world a river of hope springing up in the midst of the deserts of despair. Honour and blessing, glory and praise to you forever! Amen.

(Adapted from Miriam Therese Winter, Woman Prayer, Woman Song by Rosanne Athaide, CCODP)
A Drink Blessing

God bless us this drink
Give water to all who are thirsty
And a thirst for justice to all who are quenched
God bless us this drink

(Simeon Mitchell/Christian Aid. Based on a table blessing from Argentina, set to music in the ‘Love and Anger’ songbook (Wild Goose Publications, 1997)

Closing prayer

Now, O Creator of Living Water,
send us out with a daring love
for all creation.
Lead us as you led the people of Israel
across the Red Sea.
Guide us to life-giving water,
as you did for Hagar.
Challenge us to offer the water of life freely,
as you did through Isaiah.
Remind us that your table is open for all
and that you feed all, as you showed us on a hillside with thousands
and with your followers in an upper room.
Immerse us in the water of new life, as you did for Jesus;
and send to us the Holy Spirit of peace, justice and love.
AMEN.

ADDITIONAL PIECES FOR READINGS AND REFLECTION:

Give Us This Water: A group reflection

Reader 1:
... the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but

water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower
and bread to the eater... (Isaiah 55:10)

Reader 2:
The Spirit of Yahweh hovered over the water. It is the gift of water we celebrate today.

(A person picks up the container of water, circles the group during the reading and replaces it on the table.)

No element is mentioned more often in scripture: water for cleansing, water for baptism, for refreshment and life, water for transition from one stage of life to another, water for blessing.

All: Give me this water, that I may not thirst.

Reader 3: We claim the water of life,
whose rush announces the birth of a baby,
water of life that nourishes
seeds and plants roots deep in the earth.
We celebrate water without which all that lives would shrivel and wither away, water of our life.

All: Give me this water, that I may not thirst.

“Come to me and I will give you living water, and you will never be thirsty again.”

Today, we pray that our thirst be kept alive, until the justice that we thirst for is realized.

All: Give me this water, that I may not thirst.

“Show us Lord, how to be frugal till all are fed; how to weep till all can laugh, how to be meek till all can stand in pride; how to mourn till all are comforted; how to be restless
till all live in peace; how to claim less
till all find justice.

Amen!

(Adapted from More than Words, Schaffran and Kozak, by the Ontario Council of Development and Peace.)

fifty-eight percent*

our bodies
mostly water
elegance of
healing cells
flowing blood
mostly water
beauty of
babe's chubby cheeks
elder's wise eyes
mostly water
wonder of
tree ripened apples
earth formed potatoes
mostly water
persistent drops of memory
patiently recall
meandering rhythms
graceful limits of
streams and seasons
deregulation and privatization
over our
dead bodies
mostly water

(*babies are 75% water, men 64% and women 58% water)

(Eileen Klassen Hamm, Peace and Justice Programming: Mennonite Central Committee, Saskatchewan)
Some Biblical Water Themes

Water is a sacred symbol in all religions, appearing frequently in prayers, teachings, rituals and sacred texts. In the Hebrew scriptures (shared by Christians and Jews) and in the New Testament, there are many references to water. Here are some of the many biblical water themes and examples of texts where these themes can be found:

**Water as source of life...** Described as one of the original elements of the world in Genesis 1:2; In 2 Peter 3:5, water is the substance from which things are made. Jeremiah describes God as “the fountain of living waters” Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13

**Water as hospitality...** Abraham offers water to wash the feet of the three angels who meet him in Genesis 18:4; Offering water is the test of hospitality met by Rebekah in Genesis 24; In Matthew 10:42, Jesus speaks of sharing a cup of water with the thirsty ones as an essential act of a generous faith.

**Water as cleansing...** In the Old Testament washing with water held an important place in the temple ceremony such as in Leviticus 11:32 or 16:4; or Exodus 30: 17-21 and was associated with spiritual cleansing as in Ezekiel 36:25.

**Living water as the gift of eternal life...** In the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4:14 and in the vision in Rev 21: 6 the living water of Christ means new life. This is linked with the frequent focus on the role of water in the transformation of baptism.

**Water as the “stuff” of miracles...** God helps Moses to make the bitter water sweet in Exodus 15: 22-27 and brings water from a rock in Exodus 17: 1-7. Other stories include turning water into wine as in John 2: 1-11 and walking on water as in Matthew 14:22.

As well as these many positive meanings for water, water is also danger and death as in the story of the Great Flood and the drowning of Egyptians in the Red Sea.

There are frequent references to bountiful water (within a desert context) as symbolic of God’s blessing such as in the vision of Ezekiel 47: 1-12 and Isaiah 41: 17-18 and 35: 6-7. These are contrast with understandings of drought as the punishment of God as in 1 Kings 17:1, Jeremiah 14: 1-6 and Haggai 1: 10-11.


“For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground.”

Isaiah 44:3