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**SOUTHERN AFRICAN FAITH COMMUNITIES'  
ENVIRONMENT INSTITUTE**

## CELEBRATING A MULTI-FAITH EARTH-KEEPER DAY

A multi-faith liturgy is included below for multi-faith groups to gather together in celebration of Earth-keeper Day as a statement of solidarity to honour all life on earth. Notify those who plan to attend the celebration in advance to pack a picnic lunch with the intention of sharing some of their traditional foods with others, explaining the cultural background and preparation.

**VENUE:** Choose a natural outdoor venue that is easily accessible. If at all possible select one that reflects the five basic elements from the Baha'i, Buddhist and Hindu faith communities, namely: earth, wind, fire, water, and space. Alternatively, choose one where it will be reasonably easy to symbolize each of these elements.

Allow for the possibility of rain either by warning people to bring their own umbrellas, or making provision for some form of shelter at the venue itself.

**INTERACTIVITY:** Allow for as much multi-generational participation and interactivity as possible as an expression of the holistic nature of this celebration. Consciously allocate different aspects of the liturgy/programme below to different faith groups and different age groups.



**EARTH KEEPER DAY**  
a day of love for creation

## LITURGY/PROGRAMME:

- **Welcome & Introduction:** Arrange for one person from each of the faith groups represented at the gathering to say a one-line traditional greeting in their own language from their own culture. This should take no more than five minutes in total. Then have one person who is environmentally informed and who has multi-faith sensitivity to provide a brief general introduction of no more than five minutes with an explanation of the nature and purpose of Earth-keeper Day and reasons for using it to replace Valentine's Day.
- **Scripture Sentence:** Ask a teenager from one of the faith groups to choose a short sentence from their own sacred writings that emphasizes the call to unity and care of the earth, eg the shared greeting of *shalom* in the Jewish and Christian traditions, or Islamic teachings of *tawhid*.
- **A Hymn of Praise:** All the faith groups believe creation carries evidence of the presence of God in one form or another, and that all nature sings his/her praises. Invite everyone to listen in silence to the sounds of nature around them. Mention at the outset the idea that all creation is in synchrony with the rhythm of the earth and that everyone should try to breathe slowly and steadily with the pulse of life. Allow for those who are musically gifted to bring their own spontaneous contribution to the praises sung by nature whether this is rhythmic clapping or tapping, vocal sounds, song, or any other way of praising God. What may happen is a gradual increase in sounds of praise as people gain confidence and develop a feel for the paeon of praise arising from the heart and soul of those gathered in unison with that of creation.



- Celebratory Exercises:

**A) Honouring the Circle/Cycles of Life:** All faith groups believe in eternity or perpetuity in some form or other. The circle and repetitive cycles are seen as symbolically significant, together with balanced living based on the common elements shared by all life forms. As mentioned above, the Baha'i, Buddhists and Hindus believe in five basic elements in all forms of life.

Draw a circular mandala with five “segments” on the ground or on a large sheet of paper or fabric that can be spread on the ground. See examples below.



Gather in a circle around the mandala, leaving sufficient room for freedom of movement around the perimeter and easy access to the five segments. Allow for the elderly and inform to sit on folding chairs so they don't have to remain standing for too long. Ask four children to bring forward a symbol each of the first four elements listed below (*Pancha Maha Bhuta* in Sanskrit) and to place these on four of the five “segments” in the mandala. These symbols could, for instance, be:

- Earth (*Prithvi*): a small earthenware bowl filled with soil
- Water (*Jala*): a glass jar containing water
- Fire (*Agni*): a candle or small brazier that is lit once it has been placed on the mandala
- Air/wind (*Vayu*): a pin wheel which will, hopefully, pick up enough of a breeze for it to spin
- Space/ether (*Akasha*): the fifth “segment” is left empty to represent empty space.

As each child places their symbol on one of the five mandala “segments”, the following words of prayer/mediation are spoken:

- **Earth:** You cradle and hold all creatures giving them support, food and shelter. We honour your solidity and structure; we give thanks for your constancy, nourishment and comfort, and our marvellous ability to smell earth's aroma.
- **Water:** You are the river upon which all life flows, bringing connectedness and reproduction. You transport nutrients to the cells and carry away toxins and waste. We honour your liquid coolth, soft fluidity and cleansing properties; we give thanks for the way in which you sustain life, and the sense of taste that helps us to know the sweet flavour of life.



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- **Fire:** You bring transformation and metabolism. You represent intelligence and comprehension. We honour your warmth and light; we give thanks for your radiant energy and our ability to see the beauty of the earth.
- **Air:** You are movement allowing for direction and bringing new breath to stale lives. You provide for our sense of touch, hands to give and to receive. We honour your subtlety and mobility; we give thanks that life is dynamic, shifting us ever closer to our goals.
- **Space/Ether:** You are the mystery of space within which all existence finds itself. We honour your infinity and emptiness; we give thanks for the infinite potential contained in that emptiness, and rejoice in the gift of sound and hearing.

Conclude with the words: We honour the balance of these five primal elements that help to sustain life on earth. We recognize that our actions can create an imbalance that causes discomfort and may even threaten life. In keeping with each of our own faith traditions, we now commit to balanced living according to our individual sacred teachings.

- *Allow a few moments of silent contemplation.*

**B) Kinetically experiencing oneness with all life:** Allow the elderly or infirm to remain seated for this exercise but ask all who are able bodied to stand. Younger members might like to take off their shoes so that they can feel the earth beneath their feet.

Ask all those gathered to follow the instructions provided below in a quiet contemplative way and to experience the sense of physical interconnectedness:

- Curl your toes into the earth and imagine roots stretching deep into the soil from which we spring and to which we return. Know that you are one with the earth.
- Stretch your arms and hands as high as you can. We reach for the stars, not with possession, but with a yearning for the wonder of the heavens and the freedom of vast open space. Know that you are one with the universe and a link between heaven and earth.
- Reach out your arms and take the hands of those on either side of you. We reach out to each other with mutual respect and understanding as members of one universal family. Know that you are not alone, but one in community with all people worldwide and all creation.
- Hold out your hands in front of you as if you were holding a large glass sphere or globe. This is our fragile earth, placed in your hands for safekeeping. Can you feel:



- The weight of the earth? Is it too great a burden for you ... a burden of excessive responsibility? Or is it light in your hands, as you rejoice in its beauty? Can you feel its inner distress and turmoil at our human abuse and misuse? Does it feel out of balance? Is the tilt of the axis changing?



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- Hold it gently, remembering that the earth is not static but dynamic, spinning upon its own axis and following its elliptical path around the sun. Can you feel the movement of the earth in your hands? Can you feel the pulse of life, the rhythmic heartbeat of the earth? Are you in synchrony with this rhythm of life?
- You not only hold this fragile globe in your hands, but you yourself are part of it. Take a moment in silence to feel yourself gently spinning with the earth; feel the surge of the oceans; the dry and arid warmth of the desert; the busy purposeful scurrying of the ants; the freedom of an eagle in flight. Know the solidity of the elephant and ephemeral beauty of the butterfly. You are one with creation. Rejoice!
- Prayer of Thanksgiving and Blessing: Close with a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing before sharing a joint picnic celebration, but first allow a minute or two for a representative from each faith group to talk about their religious restrictions with regard to food and how this impacts on the environment. Then allow two or three members of different faith groups to say a traditional prayer of thanksgiving and blessing.

Alternatively, you might like to use a multi-faith prayer such as the one below:

*Unless we till the soil, plant and care for the crop, there is no harvest to reap;  
But with honest toil and hands that gentle the earth,  
She yields her fruits that we might eat;  
May we share her bounty in equity and fellowship  
As we honour her resourcefulness and God's gracious provision for all. Amen*



- Agape (Love) Meal: Invite all those who are gathered to share in a meal of love, interacting with each other and exchanging culturally diverse foods while explaining about the norms, rites and traditions of the different faith groups in preparing and sharing meals.