



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#69 - September 2016

A Best Practice: Celebrating Creationtide (Part II)

Last month we reflected upon our call to care for the earth – its roots in our Catholic tradition and how others have celebrated that call, especially within the public prayer life of their traditions. We looked at an overview of Creationtide, exploring how this liturgical season has been celebrated in Christian Churches around the English speaking world ([GEMS #68](#)).

This month will focus on how one unique parish, Mission of the Atonement, in Beaverton, Oregon, has celebrated Creationtide for the last four years.

What is the Mission of the Atonement?

We learned of Mission of the Atonement (MoTA) last April in [GEMS #52](#). Located in the metropolitan Portland area, MoTA is an interfaith and inclusive spiritual community of both Lutherans and Catholics, sanctioned by

- the Catholic Archdiocese of Portland and
- the Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

As an intentional community of two Christian traditions, MoTA believes that all the baptized, the people of God, are the church, as taught by the documents of Vatican Council II. They also believe that, in keeping with the teachings of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, they have an obligation to love and protect all of God's Creation. (For more information about MoTA: www.motaspirit.org.)

How was MoTA introduced to Creationtide?

During a sabbatical in the spring of 2012, Pastor Brian Brandt, presently Interim Pastor at Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Beaverton, Oregon, offered to introduce his Creationtide celebration model to the pastoral staff and congregation at MoTA. With the help and guidance of Pastor Brian, MoTA has continued for the past four years to both celebrate and grow in the knowledge of and love for God's Creation. Most of the details that follow are based on Pastor Brian's unique view of Creationtide.

MoTA's Creationtide program structure

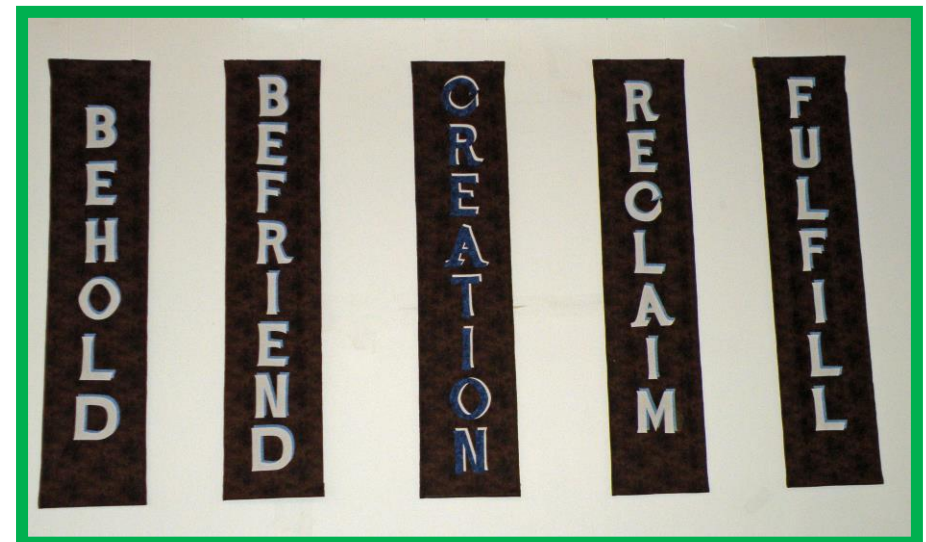
Unlike some of the models discussed last month that focus on specific aspects of the natural world (e.g., "Mountain Sunday," "River Sunday," etc.), MoTA's Creationtide model uses four integrated themes to focus on God's way with the whole of Creation - highlighting spiritual energies, relational patterns, and moral values rooted in the witness of Holy Scripture.

These same four themes are repeated in each of three lectionary cycles, with each cycle having its own specific direction:

- Cycle A – Foundations of Creation
- Cycle B – Wisdom of Creation
- Cycle C – Glory of Creation

The weekly themes remain the same in all three cycles:

- Beholding Creation: 1st Sunday of Creationtide
- Befriending Creation: 2nd Sunday of Creationtide
- Reclaiming Creation: 3rd Sunday of Creationtide
- Fulfilling Creation: 4th Sunday of Creationtide



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What is unique about these four themes?

The four Creationtide themes reflect spiritual energies, types of divine attention, and relational patterns by which God loves the universe and brings the whole Creation to fulfillment. In sequence, these four themes trace the great story of God's plan for Creation, moving from the making of the universe in the beginning to its final goal, the consummation and fulfillment of the universe in the resurrected Christ (cf. Eph 1:10).

The pattern and recommended readings for these four themes are:

First, As God creates in love, God **beholds** the splendor of God's love reflected in all Creation, blesses it, and calls it good.

First Sunday of Creationtide - Beholding

	Year A Foundation of Creation	Year B Wisdom of Creation	Year C Glory of Creation
First Reading	Gen 1:1-2:4a	Prov 8:22-31	Isa 55:6-13
Psalm	Ps 104:1-15	Ps 104:1-15	Ps 104:1-15
Second Reading	Col 1:2, 12-20	Eph 1:3-10	Heb 1:1-3a
Gospel	John 1:1-5, 14	Luke 2:39-52	Luke 2:1-14

Second, God **befriends** Creation, entering into a personal relationship of communion with every creature — including (but not limited to) the human creature — and blessing each creature so it can thrive according to its proper role within God's cosmic economy.

Second Sunday of Creationtide - Befriending

	Year A Foundation of Creation	Year B Wisdom of Creation	Year C Glory of Creation
First Reading	Gen 2:4b-9, 15-23	Gen 9:8-17	Isa 41:17-20
Psalm	Ps 65:1-2, 5-13	Ps 65:1-2, 5-13	Ps 65:1-2, 5-13
Second Reading	Phil 2:1-11	Sir 43:26-33	Rev 22:1-5, 16-17
Gospel	Matt 5:1-11	Matt 6:24-34	John 15:5-17

Third: In Creation's God-given freedom some things go awry; God acts repeatedly to **reclaim** Creation so it can once again serve God's holy plan.

Third Sunday of Creationtide - Reclaiming

	Year A Foundation of Creation	Year B Wisdom of Creation	Year C Glory of Creation
First Reading	Gen 6:5-8; 7:1, 7-10, 17-18, 23; 8:1-3, 13b-19	Job 38:1-11, 25-27, 31-33; 39: 26-27; 40:3-5	Isa 32:1-3, 9-20
Psalm	Ps 104:16-35	Ps 104:16-35	Ps 104:16-35
Second Reading	Romans 8:14-23	1 Cor 2:3-12	Eph 6:10-17
Gospel	John 3:1-17	Luke 19:36-48	Luke 1:67-79

Fourth, God **fulfills** creation, moving it toward its planned consummation in the cosmic, resurrected Christ. The purpose of this plan in all its emergent aspects is the constant praise of God's glory in a universal offering of thanksgiving and celebration.

Fourth Sunday of Creationtide - Fulfilling

	Year A Foundation of Creation	Year B Wisdom of Creation	Year C Glory of Creation
First Reading	Isa 65:16-25	Sir 16:22 - 17:8	Isa 6:1-8
Psalm	Ps 148	Ps 148	Ps 148
Second Reading	Rev 21:1-6	Eph 4:1-7, 11-16	Rev 5:8, 11-14
Gospel	John 6:35, 48-51; 7:37-38; 15:1, 5, 8	Matt 28:16-20	Matt 19:23-29

These four Creationtide themes portray God's way of caring for Creation and governing its unfolding fulfillment; at the same time they also characterize our response to God as beings created in God's image and called to play a key role in carrying out God's plan. As God beholds, befriends, reclaims, and fulfills Creation, so do we, according to our human capacities. We carry out these four modes of spiritual engagement as created co-creators acting in support of God's plan to fulfill Creation.

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Can these Scripture selections be adopted for Sunday Mass?

The themes and specific citations from the Bible were developed for use as the Liturgy of the Word in the Sunday celebrations of Mass. However, since the USCCB has not established a Creationtide program, changing the readings in the established Lectionary is usually not permitted in Catholic churches. **GEMS #68** included an Australian Catholic approach to celebrate Creationtide while remaining with the regular Ordinary Time lectionary selections.

The Australian approach can be enhanced by holding a mid-week evening gathering that begins with a stand-alone Liturgy of the Word using the pericopes listed in the MoTA approach. This liturgy can then be followed by discussions groups and/or specific activities, many of which are described in the references included in Gems # [prior issue].

What else is unique about the MoTA Creationtide program?

Program Integration. All elements of worship for each of the four Sundays support the theme of the day, not just the readings from scripture. The preaching, hymns, prayers, symbols and art adorning the sanctuary, and educational events - all these work together to create a worship experience that opens up a new appreciation for God's presence in Creation.

The program is also enhanced by weekly evening gatherings to explore, through lecture and discussion, the history and development of

Creation as well as present-day issues facing Creation, e.g. climate change.

Special activities that can include children of all ages are an important part of the MoTA celebration.



Depending on your location, consider for example:

- a nature walk at a nearby wildlife preserve
- visit to a local lake or river
- a trip to a zoo
- a parade of animals— children of all ages dressed to resemble their favorite animals, plants or other created things



Cosmic Walk. To initiate the first year of Creationtide, MoTA gathered in the evening on their Labyrinth for a celebration of “The Cosmic Walk.” Based on the work of Thomas Berry, CP (1914-2009), the Cosmic Walk is a ritual created by Dominican Sr. Miriam MacGillis of Genesis Farm in New Jersey. It has been modified and facilitated by many people around the world. The Cosmic Walk is a way of bringing our knowledge of the 14-billion-year Universe process from our heads to our hearts.

While a labyrinth is a perfect setting, this simple ritual can be performed in a large room or other outdoor settings.

- A spiral representing the entire 14 billion years of the cosmic and evolutionary journey is laid out on the floor or ground. For best effect, the spiral should be at least 100 feet long, with each instance of emergence in time marked at a proportionate distance along the length of the spiral.

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- Each such station is marked by an unlit votive candle and/or by a card describing the emergence. As a walker proceeds around the spiral lighting each candle, a narrator describes the significant cosmic events of that era.



Two versions of this descriptive narration are available on line at:

- <http://www.deeptimejourney.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/CosmicWalk.pdf>
- <http://www.diarmuid13.com/the-cosmic-walk>

Various other resources are available by googling “Cosmic Walk.”

Celebration in October. Most churches have chosen the month of September to celebrate Creationtide, ending the celebration with the feast of St. Francis on October 4th. MoTA chose to begin Creationtide on the Sunday nearest October 4th, carrying Creationtide throughout the month of October. As a small parish with limited resources, it was too much for the pastoral staff to begin new school-year catechetical programs in September concurrent with

Creationtide and many of MoTA’s families have school age children that require special attention at the start of a new school year.

Many parishes also look for summer activities that help fill the void when regular fall and winter programs are on hiatus. Either July or August would be good months to celebrate Creation, since more outdoor activities could be included.

Has MoTA benefited from celebrating Creationtide?

MoTA has always been concerned about environmental issues. Creationtide has helped to provide an important spiritual/faith basis for all its environmental activities. Children are learning the importance of caring for Creation - preparing them to carry on their concern for Creation as they mature.

Some of the comments from MoTA’s members after each year’s celebration include:

- “I really appreciated the well-thought-out homilies.”
- “The children had a great time and I hope learned something.”
- “I promise to do a better job of re-cycling.”
- “I am still wrapping my mind around the idea of 14 billion years.”
- “I am already looking forward to next year’s celebration.”



MoTA plans to continue making Creationtide an annual parish event.

Summary

Creationtide, then, is more than just a plan for a season of worship. Creationtide is a model that integrates the whole Christian life by means of the four themes: Beholding, Befriending, Reclaiming, and Fulfilling Creation. This set of themes offers a way to organize theology, biblical interpretation, ethical reflection, moral decisions, teaching of doctrine, formulation of Church policy, and daily embodiment of the Christian life.

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Moreover, planning worship with the Creationtide model means that the Christian life and all that pertains to it as a spiritual practice of Care for Creation can be grounded, nurtured, and reinforced regularly in the worship environment of the Church. Though Creationtide began as a four week worship season, it could guide worship planning for the whole liturgical year and serve as a vision of renewal for Christian life.

These two issues began with a look at *Laudato Si'*. We then explored several methods, prayer, and activities from a number of churches and denominations. We close these issues (and pledge to continue our study and action) by returning to the challenge set before us:

It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. . . .

Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God.

Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world.

The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from

God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself. Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for

our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation.

- *Laudato Si* #236

Some GEMS Wonderings

- Can a celebration of care for creation be incorporated into some of the numerous prayer rituals within our Catholic tradition?
- How might care for creation expand our commitment to respect for life?

- What seasons/times of the year would be appropriate for a celebration of care for creation?
 - Might we try a different approach to the celebration of St. Francis (October 4th)?
 - How might we pray – and act – during November, the season of thanksgiving?
 - Is there a possibility of an ecumenical service (and action) during the International Week of Prayer for Christian Unity?
- Is there a Protestant church in your area that observes Creationtide? What might you learn from them? How might you collaborate?
- Are there opportunities to join with another church for an ecumenical study/celebration of creation?



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are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Planning and Best Practices can be found at:

- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*
http://www.lifelongfaith.com/store/p25/The_Seasons_of_Adult_Faith_Formation.html
- *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation website*
<http://www.lifelongfaith.com/2015-adult-faith-formation-symposium.html>