Tree Planting Liturgy, 2017
500th Anniversary of the Reformation
Central States Synod

Opening Song: Touch the Earth Lightly, ELW 739

Prayer

God of Wonder,
You spoke the Word and all things came into being. You spoke the Word and restored right relationships through the power of the cross and resurrection. You continue to speak the Word of renewal and life as your Spirit moves among us. Open our lives to hear and see and honor your ongoing work of creation as you call us to “touch the Earth lightly” through lives of care and compassion for all that you have made. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, your Word of hope. Amen.


Invitation:

We plant this tree today as one among 500 new trees that will be planted throughout the Central States Synod to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It is our prayer that these trees will serve as witnesses to our hope in Christ in the spirit of the quotation attributed to Martin Luther: “Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.”

Trees are a potent and readily recognizable symbol of the grace, growth, and hope which are revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The tree of the cross stands at the center of our theology. Christ’s parable in Luke 13:6-9 gives us a picture of active grace that nourishes growth, while Revelation 22:2 envisions the healing of the nations coming from the leaves of the tree of life.

Trees are particularly resonant and critical in the 21st century as the world faces a serious ecological crisis that can be traced, at least partially, to deforestation. Integral to the process that converts carbon dioxide into clean water and eventually oxygen, trees give us life. Without them, we would have no future. Nor would we have our past; trees give us paper, a critical ingredient in our Lutheran story centered in the pages of Scripture.

Together with many other ELCA communities of faith in Kansas and Missouri, we plant this tree as a symbol of hope, grace, growth, and reform through God’s continuing power to create, redeem, and sustain all of Creation.
Planting of the Tree

Blessing of the Tree
O God of solar systems and grains of sand, elephants and infants, mountains and microbes, bless this tree to live among us as a message of hope for the future and a reminder of your call to care for all Creation. As its roots grow deep and strong, may our faith grow ever deeper and more compassionate. As its branches open wide to the sky, may our arms open wide to embrace the greatest and smallest of your creatures. As its leaves provide food and oxygen, may we provide food for the hungry and hope for the lost. Bless this tree as a living reminder of your love and grace always among us. Amen.

Closing Benediction
God the Creator inspire you,
Christ the Redeemer restore you,
and the Holy Spirit, the Sustainer, transform you, now and forever. Amen.

Closing song: Johnny Appleseed or For the Fruit of All Creation, ELW 679

Tree Planting Liturgy written by Pastor Noni Strand and Dr. Melody Steed

Notes on the service:
You are invited to adapt this service for use in your particular setting. Here are some suggestions:

- If congregation members are able to gather outside at the site of the tree planting, dig the hole for the planting ahead of time according to the appropriate directions for the tree selected.
- Work with a local nursery or gardener in your congregation to select a tree that will thrive in the soil and sunlight that are available in your chosen location for planting.
- Utilize the expertise of gardeners, farmers, or arborists in your congregation who can help ensure proper care of your tree.
- Children of all ages can take part in filling in the soil around the tree as it is planted.
- Use the tree planting as an educational opportunity to learn about native trees and plants in your area and to explore Creation stories and references throughout the Bible.
- Discuss ways that you can expand your care for Creation as a congregation and as individuals.