



Green Spirituality

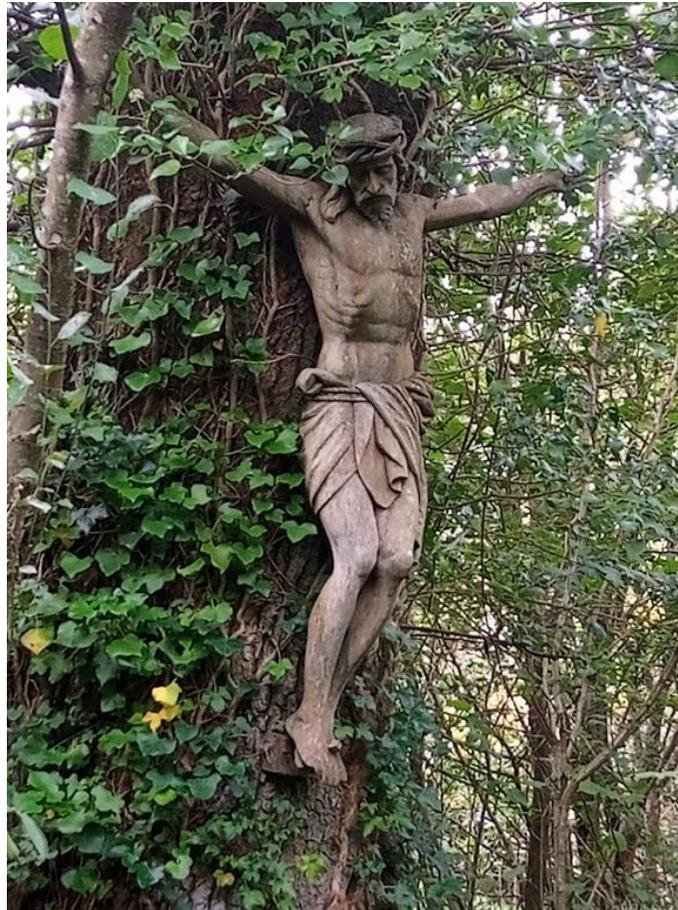
Worshipping in God's Creation

Our love for Creation stems from our love for the Creator.

At the heart of our care for creation, what provides our motivation and our passion, is worship.

How we worship is essential to enabling a whole congregation to catch a green vision. If we only ever worship in a building, we suggest or imply something about the nature of God.

What does it imply about who God is if we encourage and facilitate worship in creation?



In this workshop I will provide you with some resources to enable you to facilitate and lead worship that reflects our belief in the Creator God.

I will do this through a **brief look** at:

- **eco-theology**
- insights from the **spiritual tradition**
- some **contemporary resources**

Pope Francis' Groundbreaking Encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (Praise be to you)

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

“In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word “creation” has a broader meaning than “nature”, for it has to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance.

Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas **creation can only be understood as a gift** from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.”

God has written a precious book, “whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe”. The Canadian bishops rightly pointed out that no creature is excluded from this manifestation of God:

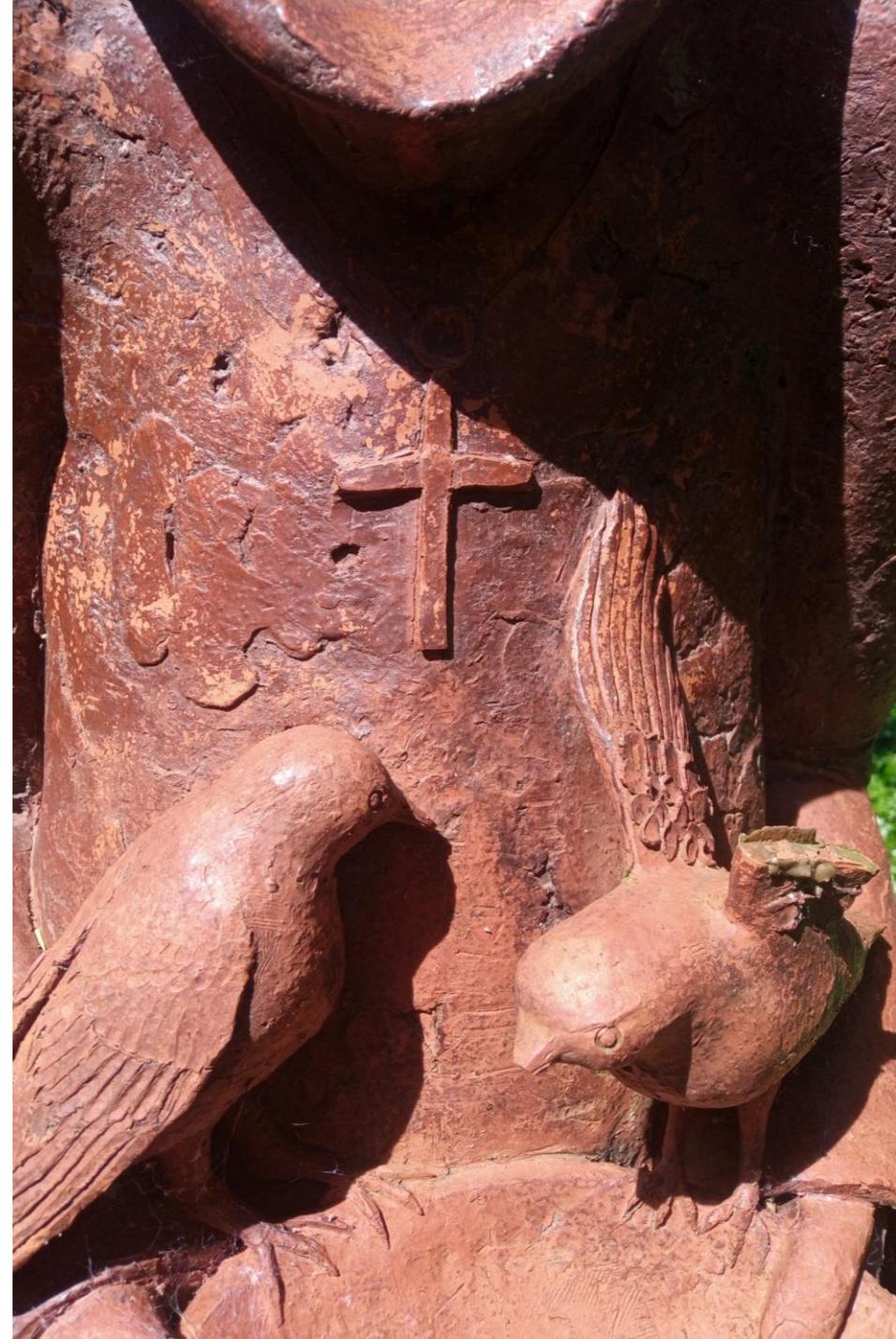
“From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine”.

The bishops of Japan, for their part, made a thought-provoking observation: “To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God’s love and hope”.

A Green Spirituality

- Fed by the belief that all of creation speaks of God.
- All of creation is of value to God and exists for God.
- Contemplating creation as an act of prayer.
- Worship and prayer that engages with and locates itself in creation is essential to a recovery of the Christian belief that creation is a gift and a blessing to receive and care for as such.
- The Franciscan Tradition is a great resource. A parish retreat to Hilfield Friary wouldn't be a bad way to start your explorations. See <https://www.franciscans.org.uk/care-of-creation/> for further information and resources.

Photo by Imogen Nay, detail of St Francis in Guy Harlings Garden, Chelmsford Diocesan offices.





verdure

Growth

fecundity

lushness

vitality

Hildegard of Bingen

(12th century abbess, botanist, herbalist,
Dr of the church, musician and mystic)

Hildegard, lesser known than St Francis, but an excellent teacher and spiritual guide for Christians today, as she has a 'green vision'.

Hildegard spoke often of **viriditas**, which can be translated as 'greening', specifically the greening of things from within. It has been translated in various ways, such as greening, freshness, vitality, fruitfulness, life-force, or growth. It's a phrase she returns to again and again. It is the driving force of her theological vision, given to her by God.

She described this power as the agent of God, a divine attribute, that was the animating life-force within all creation, giving it life, moisture and vitality. Viriditas was green fire and energy, and Hildegard has been associated through history with the colour green.

Hildegard declares,

**“There is a power that has been since all eternity and that
force and potentiality is green!”**

Biblical Resources

- **The creation stories**
(Genesis 1 and 2)
- **How to care for the land**
(Lev 23.33-43, 26.1-13, Deut 6.9-14, 8.7-18, 26.1-11)
- **The Garden as a symbol of divine love**
(Song of Songs 4.12-13)
- **God's majesty and dominion**
(Job 38)
- **God's wisdom and creation**
(Proverbs 8.1-4, 22-31)
- Look at the number of parables that Jesus tells that use metaphors from the natural world, e.g., the *Barren Fig Tree*, the *Sower of Seeds*, the *Mustard Seed* (Luke 13:6-9, Luke 8:5-15, Matt 13:31-32).
- John's use of the extended metaphor of the Father as the vine-grower, Jesus as the vine, and us as the branches (John 15).
- Jesus spends most of his time outside, being born in a cave or stable, being baptized in the waters of the Jordan, facing temptation in the wilderness; we hear of him praying all night on the mountain, riding on a colt, facing the test in the Garden of Gethsemane. When we reconsider the Bible with an eye to context, we notice that Jesus is at home in his Father's creation – 'foxes have dens, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Matthew 8.20). Read the Bible outside, re-enact the stories and see what happens!
- Romans 8.18-22 (nature's longing for liberation); Colossians 1.1-15 (Christ as the new creation); Rev 2.1-7 (promise of paradise restored).

From understanding to changed practice

Teaching on the centrality of creation to our beliefs as Christians opens the door for introducing liturgy, prayer and worship that reflects this core belief. What's important is not only that creation becomes part of our regular concern in prayer and worship but that we **enter into creation** as a place for prayer and worship.

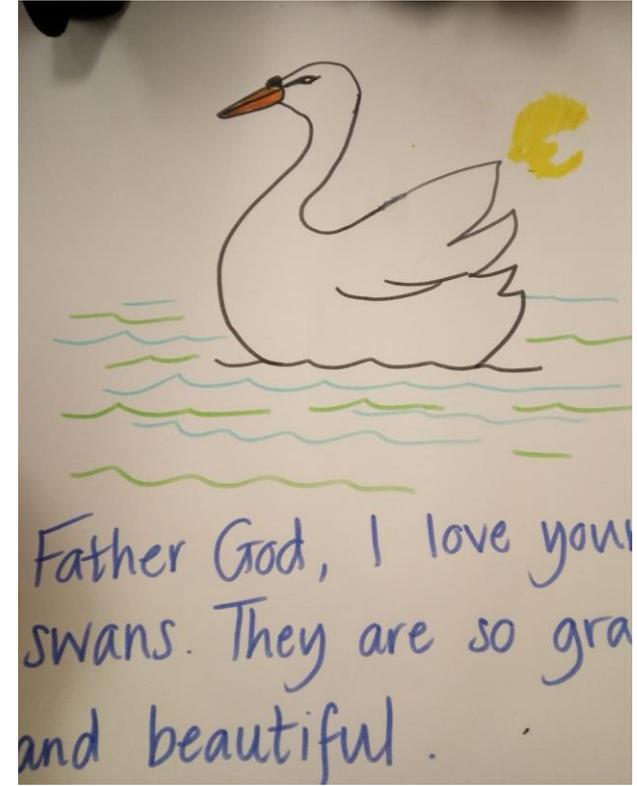


We're not just moving church outside, but we're recognizing that creation reveals to us something about our Creator, and therefore **creation itself is a site of discovery.**

Reading **The Second Book of God** alongside scripture adds a new dimension to our worship, opening up fresh avenues for understanding and praise.

A top-down view of several children sitting around a large white sheet of paper on the floor, drawing with colored pencils and markers. The drawings include a globe, a microscope, a lightbulb, a house with a clock tower, a calculator, a pair of scissors, a kite, a girl's face, a boy's face, a stack of books, a bell, a magnifying glass over the number 3, a number line with numbers 1-9, and a simple addition problem $2+2=$.

Could you start something new in your context, drawing on this teaching?



Where to start : embedded in the local

Initial Ideas

Work with your congregations and the knowledge that they have about your local area from gardening, to keeping an allotment, local nature walks and wildlife etc. Start with some initial **eye-opening activities**: Creation care prayer walk/Run a wildlife photography competition /Church litter-pick/Use what is around you as a source for prayer and praise/ Do a nature count including 'churches count on nature' looking at your church yard.

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

Mossy Church



St James', Kidbrooke



Muddy Church has a website and free resources

<https://www.muddychurch.co.uk/>

Wild Christian, A Rocha : <https://arocha.org.uk/wildchristian/>

Eyes open to new ventures

- Exploring **the local area** and connecting with local knowledge could lead to setting up something new. It might be a new form of church and there are many new examples to engage with and learn from.
- Muddy Church / Mossy Church / Wild Worship/ Garden Church..... You might have some forest school practitioners in your congregation who would be happy to advise.
- Lots of these new services are focused on children and families and are genuinely all age. But it might be that you want to set up something specifically for older people. Many churches have walking groups, but perhaps a new gardening club, in which prayer and spirituality are intertwined, could also be considered.
Get creative and engage your congregations.
- You may have an outdoor space around the church, or you may decide to meet at **different outdoor locations**, or a mix of both. It's important that what you do reflects your local context and the experience and knowledge in your church already.
- Is there a **local saint** who has a particular connection with your area? Draw on what you can to inspire and inform.



Our context for the discovery of who God is, is the whole of creation.



This session is a good introduction to worshipping in the woods. We will think about God as a gardener and get an overview of God's particular interest in trees. We will also use the beautiful age rings of a tree to think and pray about our own life and growth.

GATHERING

Praise With Psalm 96

Ask each member of your group to choose a tree they can see and try to form themselves like that tree - their bodies being the angle of the trunk and their arms showing where the branches reach. Praise God using Psalm 96. Alternatively, just read the psalm and reflect on the trees around you.

Reader: Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.

Leader: Imagine trees singing praise - what would they sound like? Let's try to make some whooshy, swishy tree-singing sounds!

Reader: Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples; for great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

Leader: Look around you - what amazing things can you see? Point to them with your branches!

Reader: Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.

Leader: Imagine bringing a gift to King Jesus on his throne - what would that look like in your tree form? Perhaps sway into a bow?

Reader: Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns.' The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.

Leader: Can you tremble before our holy and mighty God? Perhaps shake your branches.

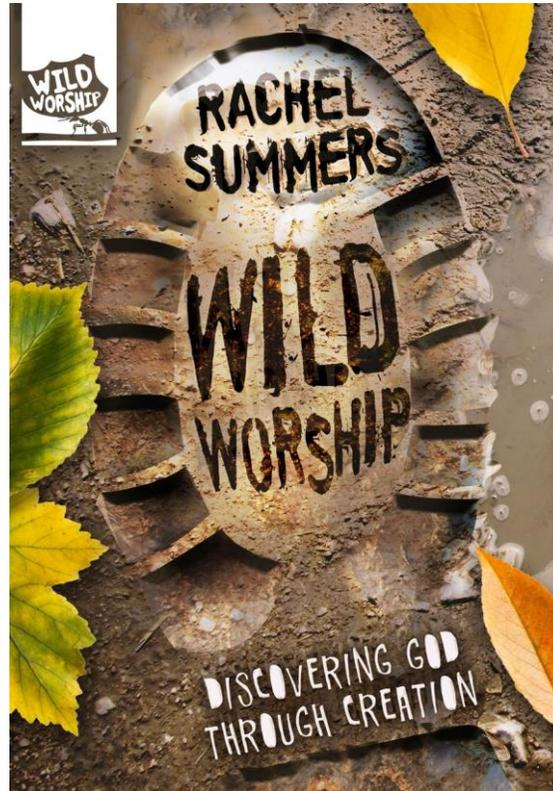
Reader: Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.

Leader: Can you be a jubilant rejoicing tree? Perhaps add some happy tree songs!

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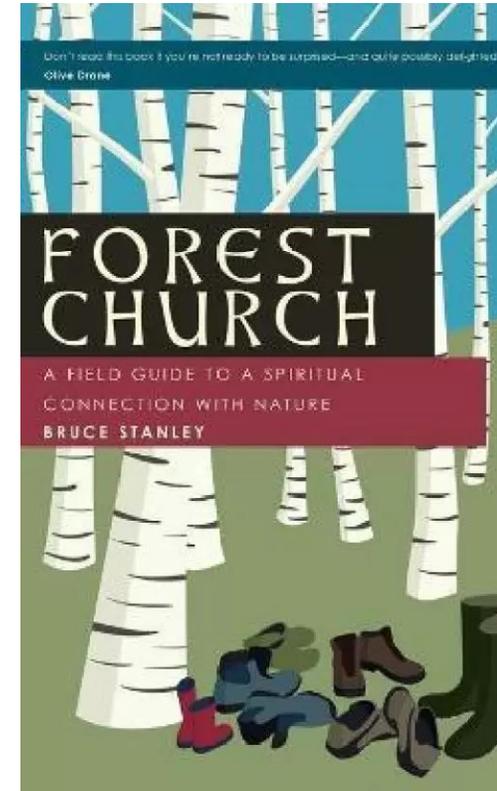
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Engage Worship have produced a *Worship in the Woods Church Service* pack based on their experience of setting up an outdoor church. PDF available. They also have some music resources on their website.

<https://engageworship.org/store/product/worship-in-the-woods-church-service-pack>

Rachel Summers is a forest school practitioner and pioneer minister in training, she has written several books on the theme of wild worship, full of practical ideas and examples focused on children and families.



The definitive guide to Forest Church and how to start one. Forest Church happens in nature and is as much for adults as for children. Based on natural theology and connections with other spiritual traditions.

http://www.mysticchrist.co.uk/blog/post/sensio_divina

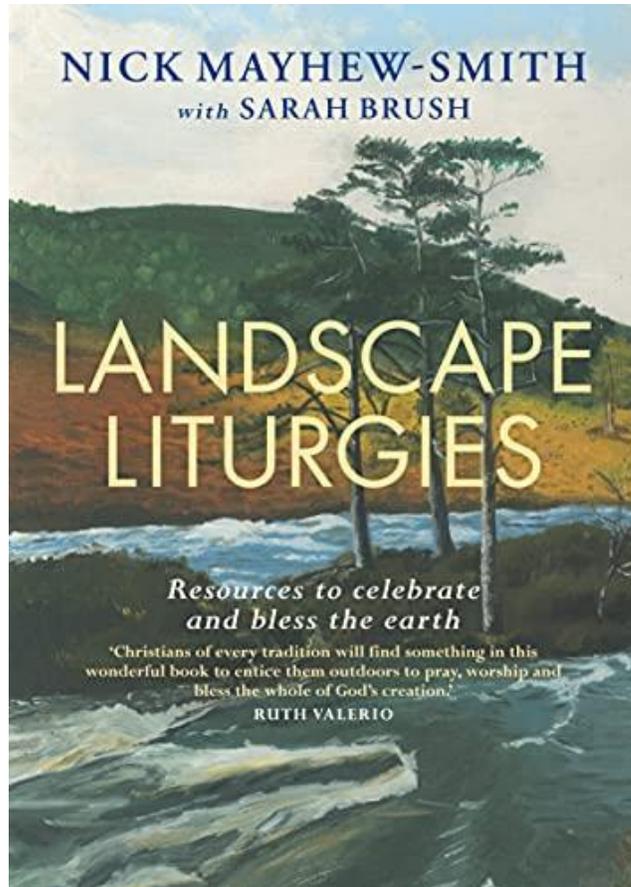
Resources for outdoor worship



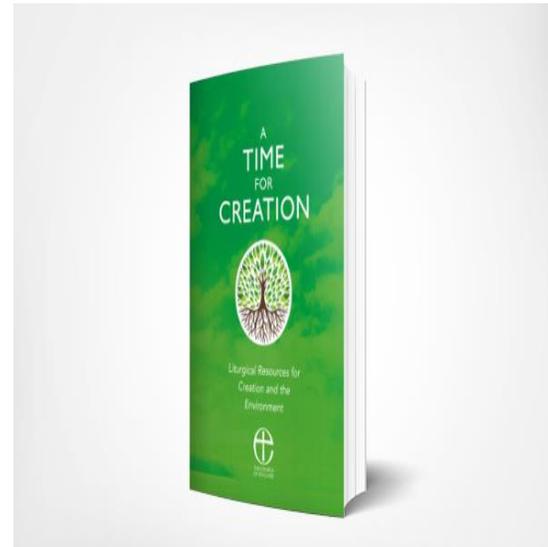
The Church of England has a section on its website with links and resources for outdoor worship.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/outdoor-worship#na>

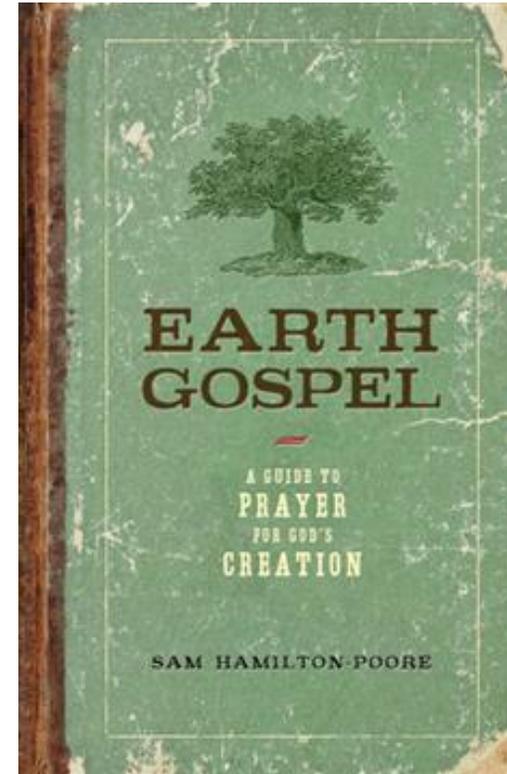
Resources for prayer and liturgy.



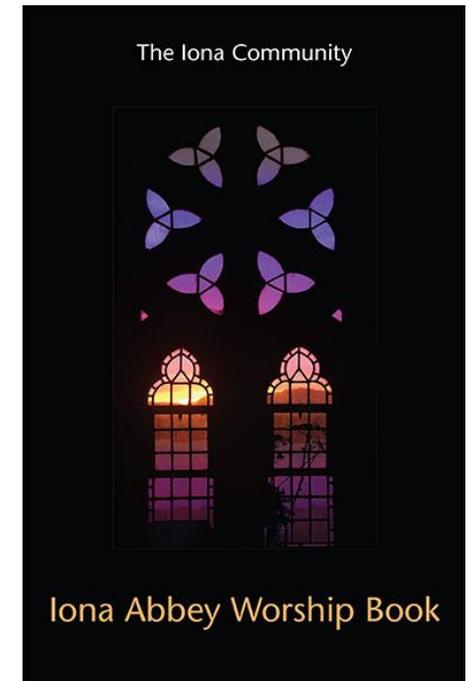
Nick-Mayhew Smith has a number of titles to his name. This one is a treasure trove of prayers and liturgies from across the Christian traditions. It includes tree blessings, blessing of water, a service for animal welfare, resources for rogationtide, and much more. Includes Orthodox, R.C. Anglo-Saxon and Celtic.



A very new resource from the C of E. Liturgical resources for creation and the environment. Includes Julian of Norwich, prayers for creationtide, the agricultural year, a proper for St Francis' Day and more. Don't forget the Season of Creation 1st Sept-4th October. Includes lament and confessional material.



Earth Gospel- my personal favourite, hugely helpful resources from scripture, hymnody and other voices.



The Celtic Tradition, with Iona Abbey at the centre, is a huge and rich resource to tap. This book reflects their vision of an integrated spirituality.

Get thinking!

- **Reflect on the context of your ministry / church / cathedral.**
- **Where are you situated, what natural resources are close by? (sea, rivers, parks, nature reserves, gardens, ponds)**
- **What are the gifts (perhaps hidden), or hobbies of members of your congregation / could you tap into their knowledge?**
- **Is there a particular spiritual guide or tradition you are drawn to: Celtic/Franciscan/Pioneering/Contemplative – explore it more.**
- **If there's just one or two of you, one way to start would be a regular prayer walk in the locale, just walk, talk and pray outside together and see what God suggests. You could use or suggest others use the following prayer podcast:**
- **Podcast: a guided prayer walk to be used in any context helping the listener to contemplate creation where they live through scripture and place. <https://soundcloud.com/chelmsdio/a-guided-prayer-walk-with-canon-imogen-nay>**