

INTRODUCTION

In response to the extreme commercialization of Valentine's Day, the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) has set aside this weekend as a multi-faith Earth-keeper Day to celebrate our love for Creation. This is an interesting proposal when one looks at traditional myths and legends associated with this saints' day.

A popular account of St Valentine of Rome suggests that he was imprisoned for performing weddings for soldiers, who were forbidden to marry. According to this legend, he healed the blind daughter of his jailor, Asterius, during his imprisonment. Before his execution, he is said to have written her a letter signed "Your Valentine". According to the embellished legend, the jailor's daughter, Julia, planted a pink-blossoming almond tree near his grave. Today, the almond tree remains a symbol of abiding love and friendship.

With Valentine's Day falling very early in spring in the northern hemisphere, it is often associated with the advent of spring. In Slovenia, St Valentine, or Zdravko, was considered to be one of the saints of spring and good health, and the patron of beekeepers and pilgrims. A proverb says that St Valentine "brings the keys of roots", with plants and flowers starting to grow on this day. It is also fancifully said that birds propose to each other or marry on this day.

There is a growing awareness worldwide of the need for greater ecological understanding and compassionate care for all life. Holistic love and concern for the earth and its many life forms has given rise to various earth-keeper movements over the past decade or so. It makes good sense, therefore, to extend this traditional day of individual romantic love to include a more corporate pragmatic love for the whole earth in community.

This is the challenge that SAFCEI extends to major faith communities throughout southern Africa: to replace the consumerism of this weekend with a spiritual and pragmatic honouring of this day as keepers of the earth to express respect and love for the sanctity of all life.

Holism and Inclusivity

As Earth-keepers, we recognize the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things in nature. Earth-keeper Day therefore calls for holistic celebrations that include multi-faith and multi-generational activities together with a deep consciousness of the impact of our attitudes and actions on other life forms.

Whatever is planned for Earth-keeper Day should take into consideration:

- Restrained use of water and energy
- Avoidance of environmentally damaging products eg plastic containers, bottled water, products transported over long distances, toxic substances, etc
- Respect for the indigenous ecology and local biodiversity



EARTH KEEPER DAY
a day of love for creation



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- Limited consumption of goods and proper management of waste
- Fair trade practices and locally produced goods to avoid excessive transportation
- Use of public transport or bicycles to limit the use of fossil fuels.

Planned celebratory activities should demonstrate love and care for all the earth. Earth-keeper Day should also not be seen as a once-off annual event, but as a meaningful start

to new life-style habits that express steady long-term growth in responsibility as earth-keepers.

A multi-faith liturgy is provided below for a combined celebration of Earth-keeper Day by people of different faiths gathered together in their common concern for the environment and community of life.

Suggestions are also made for possible outings and/or activities together with multi-faith prayers and devotions to ensure a spiritual overtone, as well as pragmatic action, for celebratory event/s by individual families. The intention is that these should include the extended family and be multi-generational in their approach.

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.