Liturgies for Addressing Heat Justice

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Introduction

In a world where rising heat increasingly burdens the most vulnerable, the church is called to be a place of refuge, compassion, and hope. These liturgies are offered to help congregations pray faithfully, respond mercifully, and bear witness to God's care for both people and creation. Developed as part of the Cooling Communities initiative at Duke University, this work invites faith communities to embody Christ's love by becoming spaces of shelter, renewal, and justice in a warming world.

*—**Michelle Lewis**, D.Min.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

A resource for churches addressing creation care and heat-related justice.

Leader: Come, all who are weary from the heat of the day,

People: We come seeking shade, rest, and renewal.

Leader: The earth groans under our feet, scorched by greed and neglect.

People: Yet God calls us to tend and to till, to restore and renew.

Leader: Jesus said, "I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink."

People: We come to worship the One who offers living water.

Leader: Let us worship God—

People: Creator of the earth, Sustainer in every storm, Comfort in every wave of heat.

This Cooling Communities project resource was developed by Margie Peeler in Spring 2025 while fulfilling degree requirements as a student Agent of Thriving at Duke Divinity School.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Intercessions for a climate-aware congregation.

Leader: God of Creation, we lift our prayers for a world in crisis— For the land, parched and cracking; for the air, heavy with heat; for the ones with no relief from rising temperatures.

People: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for agricultural workers laboring in dangerous heat, For elders and infants in homes without cooling, For all who cannot afford to escape from the sun's unrelenting weight.

People: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: We lift up those with chronic illness— those whose hearts strain harder in the heat, those managing diabetes or high blood pressure, those at risk for pre-term labor when temperatures rise, those whose health is most vulnerable to intensifying environmental factors.

People: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: Stir our hearts, O God, to become churches of refuge and resilience. Teach us to use what we have—our buildings, our budgets, our voices— to be cooling centers, safe havens, and agents of justice.

People: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: We pray for wisdom among leaders—faith, civic, and corporate— that energy policies, climate solutions, and community action may rise from the voices of those most impacted.

People: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: Creator God, in a world growing hotter, make us people who burn not with fear, but with love that shelters, restores, and acts. In the name of the One who walked dusty roads, shared cool water, and taught us to care for the least of these.

People: Amen.

COMMUNION LITURGY

The structure is modeled after the Communion liturgy used by many mainline protestant denominations. This particular liturgy is climate-conscious and grounded in justice.

Invitation to the Table

Friends, this is the table of grace—not a table of escape, but a table of engagement. Here, in the body and blood of Christ, we remember the One who shared bread under open skies and water drawn from wells. We remember Jesus, who broke bread in the heat of the day, and called his disciples to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and tend the land. If you are thirsty, come. If you are scorched by suffering, come. If you long for renewal—in your body, in your community, in the earth—come. This is God's table, and there is room here for all.

Great Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Leader:

It is right to give you thanks, O God,
for from dust and breath you shaped us,
planting us in a garden and calling us to tend it.
But we forgot your call to stewardship
and sought dominion instead.
Now the soil cries out,
the forests burn,
and the heat becomes deadly.
Still, you do not abandon us.
You sent prophets to remind us,
and Jesus to redeem us.
He fed crowds with simple meals,
walked among those suffering in body and in spirit,
and opened the way to life abundant.
And so, with all who cry out from the heat,
and all the saints who found shade in your mercy,
we join in the unending hymn:

All: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

Words of Institution

Leader: On the night of his arrest, Jesus took bread—grown from the earth,
and blessed by sun and rain.
He gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them, saying:
"This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
In the same way, he took the cup—fruit of the vine, symbol of joy and suffering—and said:
"This cup is the new covenant, sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.
Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me."

In remembrance of these mighty acts, we offer ourselves
Unto you and ask that your transforming and healing hand be upon us
So that we might be your transforming love in the world that all
would experience the coolness of both clean and cleansing water
And your gentle breeze that cools us when the heat of the land rises.
All glory and honor are yours almighty God, and
we pray now with the confidence of your children. **Our Father…**

You are invited to come to this table and eat of the bread of the earth
And drink of the fruit of the vine.

Prayer After Communion

Gracious God, you have filled us with your love at this table— not just for comfort, but for courage. Send us now into a world of rising heat and frayed systems with hearts stirred by justice, hands open in compassion, and feet ready to go where your Spirit leads. May we be, as Christ's body, cool water to the thirsty and shelter to the weary.

Nicholas Institute for Energy, Environment & Sustainability

The Nicholas Institute for Energy, Environment & Sustainability at Duke University accelerates solutions to critical energy and environmental challenges, advancing a more resilient and sustainable world. The Nicholas Institute conducts and supports actionable research and undertakes sustained engagement with policymakers, businesses, and communities—in addition to delivering transformative educational experiences to empower future leaders. The Nicholas Institute's work is aligned with the Duke Climate Commitment, which unites the university's education, research, operations, and external engagement missions to address climate challenges.

The Heat Policy Innovation Hub

The Nicholas Institute's Heat Policy Innovation Hub is the first program in the United States dedicated to cross-disciplinary innovation on extreme heat policy and practice. Located in a region profoundly affected by extreme heat, Duke University is particularly well-situated to influence—and potentially transform—our nation's approach to this critical issue. The Heat Policy Innovation Hub brings together Duke's globally recognized expertise in medicine, health, policy, engineering, the environment, and ministry.

Cooling Communities

The Cooling Communities initiative brings together community leadership, trusted faith-based institutions, and financial innovation to explore scalable, locally rooted strategies for heat resilience. The first phase of the project has been led by the Heat Policy Innovation Hub in partnership with Duke Divinity School and Interfaith Power & Light.

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