Author: Paul F. Bosch [pbosch@golden.net]
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GREENING CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
Part Four: An Order for Blessing the Fields

1) Here's a brief **Order for Blessing the Fields** that can be adapted for use in your congregational setting. In seaside locations, it can also be adapted as an Order for Blessing the Seas, or for Blessing the Fishing Boats. I'd use it on *Rogate* Sunday, the Fifth Sunday of Easter, which has been a traditional date for observances such as this.

2) The Fifth Sunday of Easter precedes, now by a full week, the three traditional **Rogation Days**, the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Ascension Day, during which, in earlier times, rural congregations would gather to offer prayers for the planting and harvesting to come. Rogation comes from the Latin *rogate*, meaning "to pray".

3) Where might a contemporary congregation gather, particularly in an urban setting? In a community garden? In a local city park? At a nearby city lake or streamside? An empty lot? A local garbage dump? This Order could be a significant **witness** to the neighbourhood if your assembly were to schedule your Blessing of the Fields at the site of a nearby industry notorious as a local polluter, and alerted the local media. Street theatre with a liturgical twist!

4) The rite itself is designed to be **brief**: five to ten minutes, max. It's presented here as a conclusion to the regular Sunday Service in your parish, although it could also be enlarged to stand alone as a separate service on a separate occasion.

5) A **congregational procession** to the chosen location is an important part of the rite. As I have maintained before in these postings, any ritual procession by a Christian congregation has the character of a protest march. You are acknowledging in your very body — here a singular noun and also a corporate noun! — that Christians owe primary allegiance to no family, tribe, race, or nation, but only to the Kingdom of God, to the Reign of Christ. For Christians, all other personal and corporate loyalties are

subordinate to our premier loyalty, to the Gospel of God in Christ.

6) So by all means plan a ritual procession to the site you've chosen, and walk there in a body. The **site** should be no farther than a five minute stroll down the street. Larger congregations might want to notify local police and public safety personnel if your procession involves, for example, crossing busy intersections.

7) I envision the people **carrying** nothing in their hands but a service leaflet and perhaps a musical instrument. See below. No hymnals.

8) Better yet would be for the people to walk empty handed, without having to rely on print resources of any kind. The rite itself could be conducted and the peoples' participation in it taught on the spot, at the site, by simple **call-and-response**. Could the processional hymn (see below) be sung call-and-response *en route*? It would take some skillful leadership. In any case I'd scatter my strongest singers throughout the crowd.

9) Leaders, still in vestments for worship, would carry a Bible, and the service itself printed out and bound in a handsome three ring binder, for leaders' use. Certain other participants would carry the **ritual items** noted below: wooden bowls with earth and seeds, and water in a covered carafe with coordinated glass bowl.

10) The procession forms after the post-communion prayer in your weekly Service of Holy Communion, but **before the Blessing**. A processional cross leads the way, then the people following , with leaders of worship last in line. If the parish possesses some handsome Easter processional banners, the banners could be spaced among the people along the line of march. Processional candles or lamps could be carried to accompany the processional cross. Balloons for the kids?

11) And if you feel especially brave, **incense**, borne by an acolyte, could precede the cross, billowing its clouds of fragrance through the crowds further back. With proper training and practice, the incense boat could be swung, Orthodox-style, in exuberant arcs or even full circles overhead — taking careful note of its trajectory! As one liturgical superstar maintains, there is no persuasive argument for ignoring our sense of smell, when a festive liturgy utilizes — and honours — each of the other four senses.

12) Still another splendid visual enrichment to the event might be to provide **swags of greens** entwined with flowers — I'd even tolerate, on this occasion only, the artificial variety — for marchers to carry *en route*, the swags useful at the final destination to establish the limits of ritual area. Children especially might enjoy carrying the swag along its length, like pre-schoolers holding a rope on an outing with their teacher.

13) And for leaving the church building and also in the last few yards to the selected site, how about providing three or four **arches of greens** and flowers under which the people march? The floral arches could be made with greens and flowers entwined

around generous sections of children's hula hoops — where I live, you can buy these for pennies at the Dollar Store, in a profusion of colours. I'd enlist six or eight young people from the parish to hold them overhead as the people pass underneath when leaving the church building, and run ahead of the crowd to position them again at the destination site.

14) Along the way: **Music and celebration**. Some marchers rejoice with finger cymbals, handbells, rattles, ratchets, or tambourines. (Your congregation surely owns a selection of these, to allow children who can't yet read to participate nevertheless in hymns on festive Sundays — under adult supervision of course?) More accomplished musicians play tailgate trombone or trumpet or snare drum or bongos.

15) And the **processional hymn**, begun as people leave the church and repeated if necessary *en route*? I vote for Francis of Assisi's exuberant paean to our magnificent world, *Lasst Uns Erfreuen*, "All Creatures, worship God most high", hymn #835 in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (*ELW*). And I'd announce before leaving the church that the hymn be sung in alternation: Men the first phrase, then women (or vice versa), including the all-but-final alleluia, which should be sung *tutti.*

16) Alternatively, there's a long tradition of using a processional prayer form, such as the **Great Litany**, on occasions such as this. The Great Litany may be found in *ELW* page 238 and following.

17) Using the Litany as a **processional prayer** has two virtues: It trains a community in the practice — and the pleasure! — of committing, not only the voice, and mind, and heart, to corporate prayer, but the body as well. (Our dreadful, book-bound, top-of-the-head, sedentary worship! See Worship Workbench Essays 7. and 120.)

18) Further, the Litany may be easily **appropriated** by a community, even without texts in hand, so long as there's support for the singing from trained singers who *do* have texts in hand, and who are strategically scattered throughout the line of march.

19) Once all have arrived at the site, care is taken of course in positioning cross, banners, and leaders to ensure an edifying **tableaux**, with sight lines unobscured for all worshippers.

20) So. Here's a **suggested rite** for The Blessing of the Fields. With adaptation it can also serve, in seaside locations, as a rite for The Blessing of the Waters. Blessing is here understood, as throughout the Christian tradition, as an act of corporate praise and thanks to God for something God-pleasing.

21) But be sure to take note also of the "**General Order for Blessing**" that appears in the *Occasional Services,* the pocket-sized companion to *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)*, the predecessor volume to *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. It may be found in *Occasional Services* on pages 183 and following. It provides a more generic set of

prayers and responses which could be adapted to your uses.

22) Be certain also to check out the prayers in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* for Harvest, page 62, for Stewardship of Creation, page 63, and for Creation, page 81.

AN ODER FOR BLESSING THE FIELDS

Worshippers form a procession for a march to a local site (see above) where they gather for prayer and praise.

WE PRAISE GOD, CREATOR OF ALL THAT EXISTS

Benedicite Omnia Opera: A Responsive Acclamation

People shout the second half of each line: "Bless the Lord". Or a choir or cantor sings the full verse, the people answering with a suitable response , such as "We praise and we magnify God forever."

All you works of the Lord, | **bless the Lord. R**

You angels of the Lord, | **bless the Lord**;
you heavens, | **bless the Lord**;
all you powers of the Lord, | **bless the Lord**. **R**

You sun and moon, | **bless the Lord**;
you stars of heaven, | **bless the Lord**;
you rain and dew, | **bless the Lord**. **R**

You winds of God, | **bless the Lord**;
you fire and heat, | **bless the Lord**;
you winter and summer, | **bless the Lord**. **R**

You dews and falling snow, | **bless the Lord**;
you frost and cold, | **bless the Lord**;
you ice and snow, | **bless the Lord**. **R**

You nights and days, | **bless the Lord**;
you light and darkness, | **bless the Lord**;
you lightnings and clouds, | **bless the Lord**. **R**

Let the earth | **bless the Lord**;
you mountains and hills, | **bless the Lord**;
all you green things that grow on the earth, | **bless the Lord**. **R**

You wells and springs, | **bless the Lord**;
you seas and rivers, | **bless the Lord**;
you whales and all that swim in the waters, | **bless the Lord**. **R**

All you birds of the air, | **bless the Lord**;
all you wild animals and cattle, | **bless the Lord**;
all you children of mortals, | **bless the Lord**. **R**

You people of God, | **bless the Lord**;
you priests of the Lord, | **bless the Lord**;
you servants of the Lord, | **bless the Lord**. **R**

You spirits and souls of the righteous, | **bless the Lord**;
you holy and humble in heart, | **bless the Lord**;
let us bless the Father and the Son and the | Holy Spirit. **R**

WE RECALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR SISTER EARTH

Members of the community with strong, clear reading voices are enlisted to read from a handsome ritual Bible, and from other sources, handsomely bound as well so as to be visually edifying.

First Reading: Genesis 1:27-31a; 2:15; 8:22: *God creates.*

Second Reading: Mark 4:26-29: *Jesus' parable of the seed in secret.*

Third Reading: Luther's explanation to the First Article of the Creed
from his *Small Catechism.*

Fourth Reading: An extra-Biblical witness.

This could be e.e.cumming's lovely poem "i thank you god for most this amazing day..." or another appropriate witness.

A splendid contribution to Christian devotion is the volume An Easter Sourcebook: The Fifty Days*, edited by Gabe Huck, Gail Ramshaw, and Gorden Lathrop, (Liturgy Training Publications 1988, ISBN 0-930467-76-0). It provides readings from classic literature for every day — weekdays as well as Sundays — in the seven-week Easter season.*

WE ASK GOD'S BLESSING ON THIS WORLD, OUR HOME

Presentation of Seeds, Soils, and Water

Three children from the parish stand before the Leader, the first with a wooden bowl of soil, the second with a wooden bowl of seeds, the third with a glass bowl and carafe of water. The Leader prays in these or similar words, hands extended over the bowls:

Let your blessing rest, O God, upon this seed, this soil, and these waters, upon all seeds and seas and soils, and upon all those who work to provide, and to preserve for the future, the rich resources of your world, our home.

Help us to love our world, with all its wonders, great and small, as you loved it in the example of your son, our brother Jesus Christ, not to abuse or misuse or waste it, but to conserve and enlarge it as your garden, to the glory of your name and to the service and the delight of all generations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WE CELEBRATE GOD'S GIFT OF NEW LIFE

The leader pronounces a blessing in these or similar words:

Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless you now and forever. **Amen.**

The rite concludes with a congregational circle dance for those willing and able: A Hora: Havenu Sholom Alechem.

Directions for a simple hora: Join hands. With the right foot, kick towards the left. With the left foot, kick towards the right. Step behind the left foot with the right. Repeat and continue. The circle will move to the left. The pace could be quickened as the dance proceeds until all fall out in exhaustion!

As an alternative to Havenu Sholom Alechem, *the traditional Israeli folk song* Shalom Chaverim *may be sung by those present and by dancers. It can be found in* With One Voice *as hymn 724.*

In seaside communities, the leader may throw a large heavy brass cross into the water, and young people from the parish may dive to try to retrieve it. See the first ten minutes of the movie "Beneath the Twelve Mile Reef".

People may return to the worship space in procession. Or the assembly may simply break up on the spot.

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