

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY



JUNE 5
2024



Journey to
A GREENER FUTURE
and land restoration,
desertification and
drought resilience



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

The United Nations designated 5 June as World Environment Day to highlight that the protection and health of the environment is a major issue, which affects the well-being of peoples and economic development throughout the world.

The celebration of this day provides us with an opportunity to broaden the basis for an enlightened opinion and responsible conduct by individuals, enterprises and communities in preserving and enhancing the environment.

The following resource is for congregations looking to acknowledge World Environment Day in services on Sunday 2 June or 9 June, or hold a special event to mark the day.

The year 1972 marked a turning point in the development of international environmental politics, with the first major conference on environmental issues, known as the Conference on the Human Environment, or the Stockholm Conference. Later that year, on 15 December, the General Assembly adopted a resolution (A/RES/2994 (XXVII)) designating June 5 as World Environment Day and urging "Governments and the organizations in the United Nations system to undertake on that day every year world-wide activities reaffirming their concern for the preservation and enhancement of the environment, with a view to deepening environmental awareness."

The theme for World Environment Day 2024 is "Journey to a greener future" and also "Land restoration, desertification and drought resilience." More background and suggestions for activities can be found here sdgresources.relx.com/events/world-environment-day-2024



Prayer Resources

I often come away from praying climate prayers
with a sense of missing
and scratchy grief.
I think it is because
no matter how we gather
or in what numbers
or with what spirit
there is still
so much to do
and the waters
are ever rising...

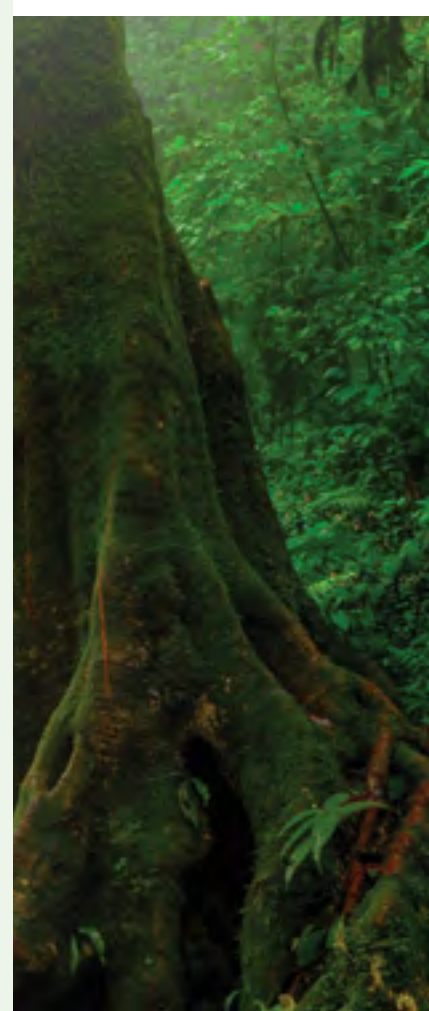
Oh God of the greening and the blue-ing
and the dashing
splashing
rainbow world

We join on this day with all that is budding
and bursting and full of hope that together
(we are your hands
in gardening gloves
and holding pickets at protests
and signing petitions
and we are your feet
in gumboots and hiking shoes
and with our toes in the warm brown earth
and with our soles resting on sand
and we are your mouth singing songs of praise
and prophecy and speaking truth to power)
that together we can turn the tide and right the
scales and stop the tipping point
from tripping and flipping us
into total climate catastrophe.

We pray today
not for easy answers..
but as a way of turning up
to You and to each other
and to all that is green and good.

What else can we do?
So thank you -lovely green and blue God
for being a drop with us
in the big wave of change that
we are ever swelling in,
right now and into the future
Amen

(Rev Alex Sangster, 2024)



God of all life, we thank you that we are never alone on this earth;
that you have given us a family in all living things.

We pray that as we journey with you this Lent, we would become more aware
of our connectedness to our whole planet.

In each meal we eat, in each breath we breathe, remind us that our bodies too
are part of the earth.

We thank you for the way you have breathed life into us and never failed
to nourish us.

Teach us to nourish all of life with the same love you have shown us.
Amen

(Mikali Anagnostis, Leichhardt Uniting Church)

Creator God,
We praise you for this beautiful world,
And ask for your guidance to take care of it.
Just as you made a covenant with all living creatures
to never again flood the earth,
May we make a promise to do all we can to stop
the flooding of our coastlines, islands and towns from climate change.
Jesus, help us resist the temptation to continue with life as normal.
May those with the power to make bold decisions to protect our future, do so.
Fill us with love for one another and for your created world,
May we find your Holy Spirit everywhere we look.
Empower us to be your children caring for your earth this week.
Amen

(Rev Deacon Andrea Mayes)

Loving God, we thank you for the many blessings you give us,
Especially the beautiful world around us.
We thank you for the way the beauty of the natural world points us towards you.
We also thank you for the way that you seek us out and offer us undeserved mercy
and love.
Your love and goodness never ends, so we want to worship and praise you forever.
We give thanks for your gift of the Holy Spirit and how it nudges us when we are
going the wrong way.
Help us notice our actions hurt other people or hurt the planet. There are so many
ways that we can knowingly and unknowingly cause harm. Whether it is by driving
our car and contributing to climate change or not taking positive actions to help
our environment.
Loving God, help us turn towards more life-giving words and actions. Remind us of
your grace and give us the strength to live as you want us to live.
Amen

(Rev Deacon Andrea Mayes)



Loving God, we praise you for your generosity,
We are in awe of your creation teeming with life and potential.
You invite us to find our place in your ecology of love;
And as we explore, work and rest with you, you call us to be open and
generous with others.
Everywhere we go, we find you nudging, encouraging, opening our ears,
eyes and mind and heart.
For your constant presence through Jesus and the Holy Spirit we are ever thankful.
God of grace,
Your Word and Spirit are mirrors for us to see ourselves as we truly are.
We are thrilled when we are like you;
And we are appalled when we hoard your richness to ourselves or
harm your creation-
Focused on taking rather than giving, holding rather than offering.
We admit that we often fall short of loving our neighbours and the created
world as we love ourselves,
So, we turn to you to be radically changed by your love.
Amen

(Rev Deacon Andrea Mayes)

We pray for:
People who are sick and those who are sad.
Those who are poor and can't afford housing and food
People in the conflicted areas of war and hunger and those who lead them-
and especially the little ones.
Our prayers:
big and small, hear them all
(pause to think of other places and situations)

Our 'families' and all who are part of our lives in all sorts of ways
The animals and especially those who are facing extinction
Our guinea pigs
Our prayers:
big and small, hear them all
(pause to name animals that matter to you)

Climate change and the effects of it through natural disasters
Those who are sick and unwell, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually
That school would be a warm and kind place where people don't bully others
Our prayers:
big and small, hear them all
(pause to think of those you are concerned about)

We pray for this land cherished and cared for by the traditional custodians,
our First Peoples.
We are sad that she is disrespected and not cared for, and we pray that people
will learn to respect her and take care of her.
And so we pray the final response together:
Your people:
big and small, hold us all.

(Rev Wendy Elson)

Though it seems that it may be too little too late,
The future of your gift of creation is at stake.

Breathe into us, oh God, a fresh sense of urgency,
That individually, but as a collective,
we tend to this emergency.

Help us to move, help us to find courage,
help us to see, That even a little can be what is
needed to stop the rising seas.

Breathe into us, oh God, a fresh sense of care,
That we make the right decisions to ensure
enough air to share.

Hear our prayer. Emeni.

**(George Abraham Walter, Tongan-Australian Worship
Leader, Canterbury Balwyn Rd Uniting Church)**

Closing Commission and Prayer

May we always walk gently upon the Earth,
in right relationship,
nurtured by your love,
open to the wind of the Spirit,
taking only what we need,
always open to the needs of others,
making choices that bring wellbeing,
living with generosity,
striving for justice,
honouring all with reverence,
reconciling and peacemaking,
mindful of those who will come after,
recognising our proper place as part of your creation.
Grant us the strength and courage, Lord,
for such a radical transformation into your Kingdom.
Amen

(Christian Aid and Christian Ecology Link)

How long, God
Will oceans and sea levels
swirl and rise, destroying
life in the Ocean shores?
Creator God, help us
journey to a green future.

How long, God
Will temperatures rise -
bushfires, droughts and
famine takes its toll on the
environment?
Creator God, help us journey
to a green future.

In lamenting, we hear
a cry: Mother earth's
groaning, Spirit Ocean's
wailing, Papa Sky
reverberating!

How Long, God
Will sky and space be a
domain to be conquered
and not the space that
offers life?
Creator God, help us
journey to a green future.

Will Tuvalu and smaller
atolls be no more?
Will rainforests be
lost and oceans life
unstainable due to
extreme heat?

How long, God
Extinction is in the land,
oceans, and sky.
Many species will be lost.
Creator God, help us
journey to a green
future.

How long, God
Will war and terrorist
acts destroy communities
[living creations great
and small]?
Creator God, help us
journey to a green
future.

Come, Lord Jesus!
Awaken us to be your
hands and feet.
Strengthen us to act justly,
to love mercy and to
walk humbly with you
Creator God, Amen.

Prepared by Rev Temukisa
Amituana'i-Vaeluaga,
Western Height Uniting
Church, adapted from
"Climate and Ecological
Emergency"
by Rev Jon Swales.

Poem

Finding signs of hope, peace, joy and love

In a garden afresh with lettuce and berry,
In a King Parrot's visit looking for seed;
In a talk with a friend, all sad and forlorn, overwhelmed and adrift with life's
deepening need.
In the call of a bird, a walk by the river,
In the love of a child that you'll covet forever.
In a faith that has shaped life's journey thus far,
in a dark summer sky, all lit up with star.
In the sharing of struggle, in the searching for truth,
in making the effort to risk without proof.
In baking, creating, in reading and making
In listening and giving, receiving and thanking.
In opening and closing, in singing and praying,
in joining with others, exploring days' breaking.

(Rev Gail Pritchard)

Stories on the theme of land restoration, desertification and drought resilience

Stories relevant to the theme of land restoration, desertification and drought resilience can be found here: <https://www.worldenvironmentday.global/2024-updates>

Other resources

Twenty ideas to connect children with nature from UnitingEarth:

<https://www.unitingearthweb.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Nature-Connection-Resource-FINAL.pdf>

You can calculate your ecological footprint using:

<https://wwf.org.au/get-involved/ecological-footprint-calculator/>

Take Action – Food and Climate Change

A journey to a greener future, along with addressing desertification and drought, means addressing climate change. In Australia, there has been a strong focus by environment organisations on curbing greenhouse gas emissions from the use of fossil fuels, increasing the use of renewable energy sources and addressing emissions from vehicle use. These are important areas of action. In addition, addressing emissions associated with food production and consumption is also important.

A third of global emissions come from food production.¹ Of emissions associated with food 57% come from animal-based food and 29% from plant-based foods. The data from the study came from 2007 to 2013. Clearing forests for farms and ranches made up 29% of the emissions related to food. The researchers estimated that 11% of emissions related to food production were generated in activities to manufacture fertilisers and pesticides and in food processing.

Large food corporations, many of which are multinational enterprises, are producing unhealthy and addictive food products that drive up unhealthy food consumption. The foods in question cause a range of health problems, including cancer, heart disease, depression, diabetes and obesity. These foods fall into a category known as



ultra-processed foods. Ultra-processed foods are those that contain additives that you would not find in your kitchen, such as artificial colouring, emulsifiers, thickening agents, preservatives and a host of other chemicals represented by numbers on the ingredients list on the packaging. They are also often higher in sugar, fat and salt. Ultra-processed foods have been progressively tailored by scientists and technicians through combinations of sugar, salt, fat and flavour enhancers to bypass our natural mechanisms of appetite control. The food corporations then employ psychologists and neuroscientists to unlock marketing techniques that target our weaknesses. After spending billions overriding our self-control, the food corporations and their commercial media allies blame us for failing to exercise it.²

The highly processed nature of these foods severely undermines public health while driving up greenhouse gas emissions associated with food production. In Australia, ultra-processed food consumption is estimated to contribute more than a third of total diet-related environmental impacts.³ These activities are pursued to increase profits for the owners and shareholders of the food corporations.

These ultra-processed unhealthy foods disproportionately impact low-income communities. A combination of poverty and the stress, anxiety and depression associated with low social status appears to make people especially vulnerable to unhealthy diets.⁴ The foods that drive up obesity prevalence are often cheaper than healthy alternatives at the point of sale. Further, time poverty for those who need to work excessive hours to make ends meet results in a reliance on fast food for those who do not have time to cook.

The true cost of such unhealthy foods is passed on through the harm done to people's lives and increased costs within the health system. Research released in March 2023 indicated that more than half the global population will be overweight or obese within 12 years if prevention, treatment and support do not improve.⁵ The economic impact of people being overweight and obese is estimated to reach \$6.75 trillion by 2035. At almost 3% of the global Gross Domestic Product, the cost is comparable with the impact of COVID-19 in 2020.

The drivers of obesity relate to the changing nature of food, towards more addictive, unhealthy, ultra-processed foods rather than some simultaneous failure of the collective “willpower” of people across the globe.⁶

Around two in three Australian adults, and one in four children are overweight or obese. Most Australians do not eat a healthy diet, with less than 1% of the population eating in accordance with Australian Dietary Guidelines recommendations and less than one in 10 eat the recommended serves of vegetables. Many Australians are experiencing poor health as a result, with poor diets of additive foods increasing the risk of diseases like heart disease and cancer.

A 2021 study by World Obesity and RTI International found the economic impact of obesity in Australia in 2019 to be \$36 billion, or 1.7% of GDP, projected to reach over \$150 billion (2.5% of GDP) by 2060 if action is not taken.⁷

To learn more about ultra-processed foods, Associate Professor Chris van Tulleken's 2023 book “Ultra-Processed People” is a higher accessible and comprehensive introduction. Associate Professor van Tulleken also has a load of videos of various lengths online, that you could access to include in a church service.

What you can do

Please write polite and respectful letters to:

The Hon Mark Butler MP

Minister for Health and Aged Care
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon Anthony Albanese MP

Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister



Points to make in your letters:

- Express deep concern at the growing body of research showing that foods fall in the category of 'ultra-processed foods' are causing severe negative health impacts, including cancer, depression, diabetes and obesity. Note that ultra-processed foods also drive up greenhouse gas emissions associated with food production.
- While governments should not dictate what people are permitted to eat, ask that the Australian Government should operate under the principles of:
 - Regulating additives to food under the precautionary principle that additives should only be authorised to be added to food when they can be demonstrated to be safe;
 - Encouraging healthy food choices by:
 - Heavily restricting the marketing of unhealthy foods;
 - Including the costs of the harm ultra-processed unhealthy foods are doing to the price of these foods. An example of such a response is a 20% health levy on the manufacturers of sugary drinks; and
 - subsidising the cost of healthy food, making healthy choices sound economic choices at a time when cost of food has increased.
- Request the Australian Government should introduce comprehensive regulations to prevent children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing. The regulation must:
 - Ensure television, radio, and cinema are free from unhealthy food marketing from 6 am to 9.30 pm;
 - Prevent food companies that sell ultra-processed food from targeting children;
 - Ensure that public spaces are free from unhealthy food marketing; and,
 - Protect children from digital marketing of unhealthy food.
- Ask that the government implement a comprehensive conflict of interest and stakeholder engagement policy to ensure that all food policy is developed without inappropriate influence from the food and related businesses.

Additional Activity

Hold a morning tea after your church service that tries to avoid the use of any ultra-processed foods. It will not be easy, as most packaged foods you buy in the supermarkets have additives you would not find in your kitchen if you were making the food yourself. If members of your congregation are willing to make the food themselves, the PWMU Cookbook promoted by the Uniting Church has lots of recipes that avoid artificial additives. Foods that do not fall into the ultra-processed category can still contain sugar, salt and fat, just not at excessive levels.



¹Xiaoming Xu, Prateek Sharma, Shijie Shu, Tzu-Shun Lin, Philippe Ciais, Francesco N. Tubiello, Pete Smith, Nelson Campbell and Atul K. Jain, 'Global greenhouse gas emissions from animal-based foods are twice those of plant-based foods', *Nature Food* 2 (2021), 724 – 732. See also Loren Smith, 'Fifth of global food-related emissions due to transport', University of Sydney, 21 June 2022.

²George Monbiot, 'Regeneration. Feeding the world without devouring the planet', (UK: Random House, 2022), 141.

³Chris van Tulleken, 'Ultra-Processed People. Why Do We All Eat Stuff That Isn't Food... and Why Can't We Stop?', (London: Cornerstone Press, 2023), 256.

⁴George Monbiot, 'Regeneration. Feeding the world without devouring the planet', 140.

⁵World Obesity Federation, 'Economic impact of overweight and obesity to surpass \$4 trillion by 2035', 2 March 2023

⁶Chris van Tulleken, 'Ultra-Processed People. Why Do We All Eat Stuff That Isn't Food... and Why Can't We Stop?', 7-8.

⁷Okunogbe A, Nugent R, Spencer G, et al. Economic impacts of overweight and obesity: current and future estimates for eight countries *BMJ Global Health* 2021;6:e006351. Available from: <https://gh.bmj.com/content/6/10/e006351>



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SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



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