

## Earth Day Prayer Flag Activity

**Target Audience:** Grades 10-12; Young Adult groups

**Time Need:** two full class sessions + homework;  
or one longer (2 hour) session

**Curriculum Links:**

- CST: Integrity of Creation
- Environmental Studies

**Lesson Contents:**

1. Objectives of activity
2. Preparation needed before class meetings
3. Process for introducing concept, reflection on Bishops' document, class activity directions, follow-up prayer activity.
4. Background material on Buddhist flags, John Paul II on Buddhism

*“Pray without Ceasing,”* 1 Thessalonians 5:17

### Overview of Lesson Details for Teachers

**Objective:** To engage students and/or young adults in a reflection on the Church's teaching on the environment and to celebrate the gift of God's creation in observance of Earth Day. In our faith tradition, banners have been part of many liturgical celebrations, with visual images that call us to prayer and reflection. In this spirit and tradition, and with interfaith respect, we can adapt the concept of Buddhist prayer flags. Creating prayer flags demonstrates our much-needed unceasing prayers for the healing of Creation.

**Preparation:**

1. Before the session(s), assemble the necessary craft materials.  
Necessary materials include:
  - a.) Pre-cut fabric rectangles, approximately 12" by 9": Pre-cut felt rectangles, available at most fabric stores, are suggested, but you may use any fairly substantial and stiff fabric that should be cut into rectangles ahead of time.
  - b.) Fabric paint, fabric pens, fabric markers
  - c.) Fabric glue
  - d.) Twine or fairly stiff cord to hang prayer flags on: Venetian blind cord works well and is inexpensive at fabric stores. Make sure you enough to hang all the flags on and have extra to tie cord around fixed objects for your final display.
2. Identify an outdoor spot, or an indoor location near open windows, to hang the cord with the finished flags. Make sure ahead of time you have sites to tie the cord to (such as two trees close to each other) or ways to fasten it so the flags can hang properly and flutter in the wind, sending out prayers “without ceasing.”
3. Photocopy for each class member the handout with an abridged version of the U.S. Catholic Conference' 1991 document on *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on the Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*.



# Environmental Justice

## Process:

1. Introduce the concept of Buddhist prayer flags to your class or group (see information below). Announce that your class or group will make their own versions of visual prayers that will be hung to wave out into the world to bless the earth for Earth Day and to send unceasing prayers out for the healing of Creation.
2. Ask your group to bring in small natural objects to decorate the flags; these may be small shells, bits of tree bark, leaves, blades of grass, straw, small flowers, bird feathers, and/or anything they can collect that can be used, and shared, in creating an Earth Day prayer flag.
3. Hand out the copies of the abridged version of the U.S. Catholic Conference' 1991 document on *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on the Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*. Have the students or participants read this before the flag-making class. Ask them to identify a concept, a theme, a word, or an image from this document that can be used to create a visual (and verbal, if they choose to use words in their designs) form of prayer for their flag. See the Old Testament prayer of praise for creation that begins on the bottom of the second column of the first page, and the nature images from the New Testament that follows the prayer for some visual images. (If you are doing this activity in one longer session, the participants can read at least parts of the handout and discuss it right before they start the craft process.)
4. At the first full session for the activity, have the group discuss, with the entire class or in small groups, what they responded to in the Bishops' document on the environment and what concept, theme, words or images from this document they are considering interpreting into a visual prayer—you can stress they do not have to use words or full quotes, but they can certainly incorporate these into their design.
5. Using the craft materials you have assembled, and the natural objects they have brought in, have the participants work on their own prayer flags. It is very important that they leave two inches at the top so the flags can be folded over cord or twine to be hung. Allow time for the fabric paints and fabric glues to dry.
6. At the second, or second half of the session, have the students or group participants hold up their flags and give a brief description of what the design signifies as their prayer for the earth. As they finish, have them affix the flag to the cord by bending over the top by an inch over the cord; you can use fabric glue, staple them, or hand sew the individual flags (with large stitches to save time.)
7. Hang the prayer flags so they can send out their blessings over the earth, with a prayer or prayer service. Before they hang the flags, the group can make up their own prayer or prayer service for this ritual, using their own reflections as well as quotes from the handout. They can create a litany that names the damage we have done to the earth and ask forgiveness, then name the positive actions they can take to heal the earth. Or you can use the prayers or prayer services on the Education for Justice Web Site, listed under environmental justice.



## About Buddhist Prayer Flags

Traditional Tibetan Buddhist Prayer Flags are inscribed with Buddhist symbols, prayers and mantras. Tibetan Buddhists for centuries have planted these flags outside their homes and places of spiritual worship for the wind to carry their positive words, images and vibrations across the countryside. Prayer flags are said to bring joy to the flag planter and to those in the vicinity as well as send prayers over the world.



## Pope John Paul II greets the leader of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama

“In the great ethical and religious vision of Buddhism, your path to the renewal of self and to the consolidation of the whole people in virtue and in nobility of purpose is to be respected. The profound reverence for life and nature, the quest for truth and harmony, self-abnegation and compassion, the ceaseless striving to transcend - these are among the noble hallmarks of this spiritual tradition that have led, and will continue to lead, the nation and the people through turbulent times to the haven of peace.

Our diversity in religious and ethical beliefs calls upon all of us to foster genuine fraternal dialogue and to give special consideration to what human beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them (Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 1). Such concerted effort will certainly create a climate of peace in which justice and compassion can flourish.”

-Pope John Paul II, 1984