

## Coming Home to the Cosmos

*Adapted from Bruce Sanguin, "Coming Home to the Cosmos" Mandate 41:2 (May 2010), pp. 45-47. Used with permission of Mandate.*

One of the underlying causes of the ecological crisis is our alienation from the natural world. We are biologically and spiritually kin with all of creation. We can distinguish ourselves as a species, but there is no disconnection anywhere, from bacteria to Bach.

This workshop will take about 1.5 hours.

### You Will Need

- candle
- Bibles or copies of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11–24) for each participant
- copies of the Prayer of Opening below, or a copy on a flip chart
- pens and paper

### Opening (15 min)

Once people are settled, light the candle and together pray the following prayer:

#### Opening Prayer

We, the walking, waking stars  
ablaze with wonder,  
imagination,  
and hope,  
gather to remember three words:  
"kinship" with all that is;  
"debt" that can only be paid forward;  
"gift," sacred mantra of the humble.

We shed our entitled egos,  
and drop to our knees,  
uttering a single, simple prayer  
that changes everything:  
Thank you.  
Amen.

Pass out Bibles or copies of the prodigal son parable. Ask each person to read one verse, and go around the circle until the parable is finished. (End the reading at verse 24.)

Tell the group you are going to break the parable into four sections: The Squandering, The Indignity, Coming to Our Senses, and Coming Home to the Cosmos. In each section, the group will be in conversation for 15 minutes, and then do a five-minute report back to the larger group.

### The Squandering (20 min)

The prodigal son demands his share of the inheritance and then sets out on a life that soon squanders all of it. Similarly, all of the wisdom of the entire universe is available to human beings by sheer grace, and yet in the last 300 years we have squandered this inheritance.

Discuss: What it is about the human condition in the 21st century that allows us to continue with this unsustainable agenda? Are we innate squanderers? sinners? simply foolish? Are we still cosmological teenagers in evolutionary terms? Is it blind ambition?

### The Indignity (20 min)

The prodigal son finds himself in the depths of indignity. He is working for a Gentile, not only feeding pigs, but wishing he could fill himself with pig food. This would have rendered a first-century Jew religiously unclean and unfit to participate in the life of his community. Today not a single biological system on the planet is not polluted in one way or another. We are the prodigal species.

Discuss: Lament is not easy, but allow yourselves to feel the indignity of this moment in our beloved planet's history. When we think of the chemicals flowing into our rivers and streams that end up in mothers' milk, a food system geared to a fast-food culture, massive dead zones in our oceans, the extinction of species, and global warming, we know what the prodigal son must have felt like. Discuss your feelings about the state of our planet.

### Coming to Our Senses (20 min)

The prodigal son comes to his senses. He realizes his folly and sets about writing his repentance speech.

Working individually, compose a simple prayer indicating how you have come to your senses and your willingness to take responsibility for creation. It doesn't need to be a masterpiece; just write from your heart.

Ask a few people to share their prayers.

### Coming Home to the Cosmos (20 min)

The son is now ready to come home. He has undergone a fundamental shift in identity: no longer the privileged son, he is willing to be a servant. For humans, the identity shift from entitled species to creation's servant is critical if we are going to make the changes necessary to restore our planet and her ecosystems to wholeness.

Take a moment to realize our common origin with everything that exists. When St. Francis wrote a poem to "brother sun" and "sister moon," he was intuitively expressing what scientists have now confirmed: we are members of a vast and interconnected cosmic family.  
Exercise

Discuss: What lifestyle changes have you made or could you make that would indicate that you are ready for this homecoming?

### Closing Prayer

O Holy One,  
we give you thanks  
for the gifts of the earth,  
freely offered.

May they nourish us  
to live as members of this one earth community,  
servants of abundant life,  
in memory of Jesus,  
our friend, our guide, our hope.

Amen.