



SUMMER LEADER RESOURCE

CLAY 2023

This resource has been prepared for you by the CLAY 2023 National Planning Committee to make use of as your group gathers and connects in the summer or fall of 2022, in preparation for participating in *CLAY 2023: Ashes and Embers*.

Ashes and Embers is an image used throughout Scripture whenever God speaks to God's people. The sections of this resource—spark, flame, embers and ashes—will help you explore this theme as you prepare for next year's gathering. Feel free to adapt and adjust it to your group's size and setting.



SECTION I: SPARK

By Ven. Val Kerr, Gathering Elder

SCRIPTURE READING Luke 24: 13-39

SCRIPTURE PRAYER

We pray together:

Gracious Creator, you provide us with all we need in your creation, and we are truly thankful. This day we give thanks especially for the gift of fire...that fire you plant within our hearts to encourage us to learn and grow in your light. Sometimes like these disciples we don't always know why our hearts are burning within us. Please give us discerning hearts and minds that we may use this fire you planted for your good as we cleanse our hearts and mind with this burning ceremony. Amen.

SUPPLIES

Paper; pen; matches; a safe, burn-friendly receptacle or surface (like a metal or glass bowl; fireplace or fire pit; ample water or fire extinguisher for safety. Each participant should come prepared with a piece of dried wood, some shavings and perhaps some newspaper.

ACTIVITY AND REFLECTION

For ages, fire has been regarded as a source of heat, light and **purification**. It also represents in various forms the Eternal Light, the universal symbol of God—the ever-pure Creator who removes all impurities of our souls.

In Indigenous communities there are different reasons to start a sacred fire—one reason being a burning ceremony. **A burning ceremony is a ritual** traditionally performed as a way of releasing something that no longer serves you. It is often performed on meaningful holidays, gatherings or dates. During a burning ceremony, fire is portrayed as a powerful symbol of wisdom, knowledge, passion and purification.

The burning ceremony has grown from a religious ritual to a way of releasing—the past, negativity, old resentments, hurt, grudges, regrets or suffering. This release allows participants to focus on what is more significant to them.

The best time to perform a burning ceremony is when one is going through a challenging time, transition or big change in life. The significance of the timing gives one more willingness to let go of something in their life—from negative habits to unhealthy relationships. It's the time to leave it all behind and start fresh. In letting go of expectations, the world becomes full of opportunities.



It's essential for participants to be honest, open and sincere with what they choose to release. When you can willingly let go of attachment in a peaceful state of mind, that's the best time to perform a burning ceremony. Participants are often surprised by how the ceremony can leave them feeling lighter, relaxed and happier.

During the burning ceremony, you might sense how the flames burn old energy. You can celebrate the end of the burning ceremony with the acknowledgment that you have closed the door on a part of your life that brought you sorrow and negativity.

For safety reasons, the burning ceremony should be done as a group, with a leader to be mindful of the fire. A safe space and a container is required to perform the ceremony.

Remind the group that it is important to clear their heads of any anger or irritation because it is not advised to burn in the "heat of the moment." The ritual has more impact when it is done in a peaceful, grounded state of mind. Lead the group in some grounding exercises. Take some deep breaths together and let them focus their minds and relax their bodies.

Remind them that throughout the burning ceremony, they should remain calm and grounded in their intent. Invite the group to write down what they want to let go of, and invite everyone to come to the fire individually to burn their piece of paper, allowing the smoke to carry away all negativity.

Some intentions that work well:

- I am peaceful
- I am grounded
- I let go of attachments
- I find peace when I let go

When your intentions are clear and focused, you can determine what you want out of this ceremony. Encourage your youth to write down their feelings and intentions, so they are more open and ready for release. Encourage them to stand or sit quietly in prayer or meditation, while they honour their commitment to change. Have them write down what they are ready to let go of on their piece of paper. Then have them light the piece of paper on fire and place it in your burn-friendly receptacle. Watch it burn, take a few deep breaths, and have them rub their hands together for a final release of the attachment they just let go of.

Whether good or bad, anything that is holding us back may need to be released. Burn the lists and letters, and you will start to feel the attachment leave your body and mind. By burning away the past, we can free ourselves from any regret, sorrow, or pain, and look forward to a brighter future. Let the burning ceremony allow everyone to sense a feeling of closure and the ability to move on.



In addition to cleansing the past, everyone can cleanse their aura and make it through a rough patch easily with a burning ceremony. The flames help get rid of any negative energy in your life.

So, the next time you need to let go of attachment, try a burning ceremony. You might find it's a good way to release negative energy.

BLESSING

Let us pray.

Creator of all, You are the unwavering light. You are the creator of every light.

Bless this new fire, and grant that after the darkness of this world we may, with pure minds, come to You, the Light that does not fail, through Christ our Lord.

SONG

"Start a Fire", Unspoken

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/xrEzr-rWwe8>

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/track/4jdQaEDZ4y3x54FzxfYAO?si=5f1a3d00b23341bd>

IN CLOSING

When your session is over and the fire has been extinguished, invite your group to collect some of the ashes from the fire to bring to *CLAY Ashes and Embers* in Waterloo in August 2023. You can have individual containers for each participant, or collect them in a larger container that the leaders will hold on to. Just don't forget to bring them next summer!

SECTION 2: FLAMES

By Rev. Nathan Fong and Rev. Aneeta Saroop,
Keynote Speakers



SCRIPTURE READINGS Exodus 3:1–4; Acts 2:1–4; Daniel 3:19–24; Exodus 13:21

ACTIVITY AND REFLECTION

Participants may have a lit candle in front of them or a controlled fire of sorts if in a larger group, or stream “yuletide log” in extreme and desperate cases.

The term “fire” brings with it many connotations, both positive and negative. The two phrases “you’re fire” and “you’re fired” are almost identical, but mean completely different things—one pleasant and one not so much. Gathering around a campfire can be an uplifting experience, but gathered around a house on fire most likely will not be. Fires are known to burn, tear down, and destroy, but they can also be used to build community, create warmth, and even reveal God in and around our lives.

The difference is in its context.

We read in the Bible about four instances of fire being used. Off the bat, they all seem odd. The flames are not doing what we might have initially expected them to. We think the fire would destroy the bush, but the bush was fine. We’d assume that the fire would burn or at least scatter the disciples in the upper room, but they stayed together and became stronger than ever. We thought that the fire would kill the three faithful men with difficult-to-pronounce names, but it revealed to all God’s grace and providence. We expected the fire of God to be something for the ancient Israelites in the wilderness to fear and run away from and avoid, but it acted as a guide, a compass, a pillar of hope.

This does not mean we should recklessly play with fire, thinking it would be a positive experience for us all, but it does mean when the destructive fires of life come at us, we can trust that God can be seen in the midst of it. When the harm that the world could bring affects us, we can believe that God’s healing and restoration will follow. When our own sinful nature or the ways we separate ourselves from God get the best of us and spreads like wildfire through every aspect of our being, we can have faith that God does not leave us but takes us by the hand and leads us back into the forgiveness and grace in the community of God’s kingdom with all of God’s people. That is the context in which we are born, have our being, and are dearly loved. Amen.

SONG

“Soul On Fire”, Third Day

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/LH9ciVDDi18>

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/track/73ZSUS3WLLuxgASR1Hp74B?si=f54a882e5b0f449b>



SECTION 3: EMBERS

By Rev. Nathan Fong and Rev. Aneeta Saroop,
Keynote Speakers

SCRIPTURE READING: Romans 15 :13

ACTIVITY AND REFLECTION

Participants can think about what can be considered fuel for a fire, things such as wood, paper, or gas. Then consider what is fuel for our souls, such as relationships, nature, or just rest.

The embers of a fire are what tell you that the fire is almost finished. It has exhausted its fuel, it has run out of gas, there is not much left to burn. It has run out of material to cling to, to wrestle with, and to consume. The end is near for the fire. For the fire to fully die, nothing needs to be done; it will eventually run out on its own. But for the fire to live on, it needs to be fed.

In these “ember” stages of life, we might feel like we’ have run out of energy. We have nothing left to give. Our tanks are empty. In fact, any request for us to produce any more might be met with irritation, agitation, and frustration. But that is not us. That is not who we are created to be. To get back there, we need to be fed.

But it does not always work out that way. Our tiredness might turn into extreme fatigue, our sadness into depression, our anger into hatred. Our embers might feel like complete ash before we remember who we are created to be.

We are created to be God’s people in the world. And in that, there is hope.

For God feeds God’s children in many ways, not just with literal food and drink. We are nourished by God’s Word, we are filled with God’s grace, and we are strengthened by God’s community. The calling of God’s Spirit blows through the embers of life and fans us back into flames. This promise is full of that hope, it energizes us into healing, and it leads us into the joy of knowing and believing that through these rough patches of life, there can be found peace.

We need to be fed, yes. And thanks be to God, we most certainly are.

SONG

“Wildfire”, Housefires

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/CKnTzSW5PvE>

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/track/3uzql2y2055DHpw4d1LC4A?si=cab828b6437247f8>



SECTION 4: ASHES

By Ven. Val Kerr, Gathering Elder

SCRIPTURE READING Isaiah 61: 1-3

SUPPLIES

One candle for each participant

REFLECTION

Ashes—what are they good for anyway? Well, let me share with you what I have learned. Many people use ashes to feed their flower beds, gardens, and trees. Ashes can be used to prevent us from slipping on ice, boosting your lawn or

Adding to compost...

Wood Ashes for Cleaning...

Make Soap at Home...

Keep Harmful Bugs Away...

Soak Up Driveway Spills...

Fire Control.

In Indigenous communities, some people even use ashes as a way of treating corn that is then used in soup. Mmmm. And of course, we use ashes in the church as a sign of death, repentance and remembering on Ash Wednesday.

Wood burns to ash, wood ash feeds the soil, soil feeds the tree, tree gives fruit (and here, perhaps my body's circle links with the tree's circle, when I pick that fruit and eat it), tree gives firewood, firewood give ash. The beginning and the end!

We started our journey together by building and lighting the fire and we end the journey with ashes... on this journey we have prayed together and separately, we have spent good time together, we have asked for forgiveness, we have forgiven others, we have worked at letting go of hurts of the past, both our own and others, we have given many things to our Creator while on this journey and we have hopefully learned ways of finding peace within while keeping that fire planted within us burning, we have completed a circle or cycle if you will. We have grown together and individually.

As a reminder of our time together, I ask you to each pick up a candle to carry home with you to remember that light, that fire we each have within us, and remember to nurture that fire, keep it burning. Sometimes roaring, sometimes smoldering and sometimes a soft glow of contentment...life is a journey after all not a destination.



Whenever you can light your candle or gather around a fire remember the wonders of creation that can happen in what we may consider the most unlikely places.

A quote from David Hays, a mountain hermit and poet...

"When heat comes to the mountains even the flowers go mad. They get hasty in the yard pushing colours at each other and reaching for the sun that drives the seed. Have you ever felt this passion for growth?" It is my prayer that if you haven't felt this passion that our time together has opened a space within for it to take light.

A Blessing based on the words of Henri Frederic Amiel (1821–1881)

My friends, life is short, we have not much time to gladden the hearts of those who journey the way with us. So be quick to forgive, make haste to be kind and be generous with your love. And the blessing of God the Creator, Redeemer and Life Giver be yours now and forever.

SONG

"Beautiful Things", Gungor

YouTube: https://youtu.be/Sqy1a_Gz0zQ

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/track/06wxyCQFJOT0bjvSPMQj7x?si=09ea13c491914a15>

