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Heidi Schlumpf, center, pictured with Sophie, Sam and Edmund during a family hike
(Courtesy of Heidi Schlumpf)



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There is a saying in our family that if we do something more than once, it becomes a tradition. We especially love traditions around holidays and seasons — and not just the biggies of Christmas and Easter. We celebrate St. Nicholas' feast day (with candy and small gifts), All Souls' Day (with a family *ofrenda* or altar), Our Lady of Guadalupe's feast day (with tamales) and because our kids are Asian, Moon Festival in the fall (with mooncakes) and Lunar New Year (attending the parade, eating Asian food and sharing money in red envelopes).

But my recent proposal that the family celebrate the Season of Creation got only blank stares from the teenagers.

I suppose they can be forgiven for not knowing about this relatively new "holiday" celebration. The Season of Creation [began](#) in 1989, when Sept. 1 was proclaimed as the Day of Prayer for Creation in the Orthodox Church. The ecumenical World Council of Churches later extended the celebration until Oct. 4, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, and Pope Francis made it official by putting it on the Catholic liturgical calendar in 2015.

Parishes and other church communities mark the season with special Masses and prayer services, bulletin information about environmental justice, education programs, actions like tree plantings and community cleanups and more. And of course, many churches bless pets and animals on Oct. 4.

At EarthBeat, NCR's reporting project that focuses on the intersection between faith and environmental justice, we have in the past offered emailed prayers and reflections during the Season of Creation. This year we are excited to inspire with video "Prayer Poems on Creation" by Desiré Findlay. Check out the twice-weekly videos at EarthBeat's Instagram account [@earthbeatncr](#).

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In the interest in stepping up our family's Season of Creation game, I've come up with three ways for our family — and possibly yours — to connect with God's creation during this month-plus celebration.

1. Get out in nature. Our kids are at the age when Mass is considered "boring," so every once in a while my husband and I surprise them with "outdoor church." This means instead of being required to attend Mass as a family, they are required to go on a family hike. (The groans and complaints are only a little less.)

We are lucky to live near forest preserves, nature centers and state parks, not to mention the shoreline of Lake Michigan. Any chance to walk on something besides asphalt and concrete automatically brings my blood pressure down — the farther from the city, the better. But we also don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. If we've only got an hour or so, a walk along the lakefront's bird sanctuary is better than a delayed plan for a farther-away trek.

We can more explicitly connect this to our faith by cultivating a sense of wonder, awe and respect for the natural world. Keeping an eye out for animals, birds and even bugs, or noticing particularly interesting or beautiful plants or flowers can remind us to give thanks to the Creator who gave us such beauty.

2. Eat lower on the food chain. Thanks to my daughter's decision to become a vegetarian about two years ago, everyone in our family has decreased their meat consumption. Although she was originally inspired by a love of animals, we have talked about the other health benefits of eating more plants (although we all still eat fish and seafood), especially for those of us getting old enough to worry about our cholesterol numbers.

But we have been less explicit in talking about how eating lower on the food chain helps combat global warming and conserve water resources — something we could focus more on during the Season of Creation. As I learned from EarthBeat's "[Recipes for an Eco-Friendly Lent](#)" series last year, "Dietary dependence on animal agriculture is one of the leading contributors of climate change and environmental degradation."

We have our tried-and-true vegetarian meals (this [Cheesy Lentil Spinach Casserole](#) is a favorite), but the Season of Creation would be a good time to expand our repertoire to include some new recipes. And since every holiday is better with food,

why should the Season of Creation be any different?

3. Reevaluate our consumerism. This year's Season of Creation has coincided with a rather large project of emptying our basement for an upcoming renovation and repair to water-damaged walls in our 100-year-old home. In an effort to the keep the rest of the house relatively clutter-free, we have relegated much of our "overflow stuff" to the basement, and having to sort and get rid of most of it has been a humbling lesson in overconsumption.

We already practice eco-friendly shopping in that we thrift and shop for used items when possible, avoid big-box stores and the mammoth online outlets, and try to frequent local and small businesses. But the only sustainable way for the poor in the world to have more is for those of us in developed countries to have less. The Season of Creation is a good time to recommit our family to remembering that the best in things in life are not things. (My son notes that he's glad the Season of Creation ends before his birthday!)

There is one more way that I know my daughter would love for us to mark the Season of Creation: with the acquisition of a pet, preferably a dog. Our animal-lover has been begging for a canine member of the family since the beginning of COVID-19, and I know she would like nothing better than to bring a new puppy to a St. Francis blessing. Given other family members' allergies and reluctance, I don't think that will be happening this year. But there's always next year's Season of Creation!

Do you have any ideas for ways for families (of all ages, with children or not) to celebrate the Season of Creation? Share them with me at hschlumpf@ncronline.org.

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