

## “Water Communion”

September 7, 2014

This morning we mark the beginning of our regular church year. Most Unitarian Universalist congregations take some kind of break during the summer months; either knock off services altogether or make do with simpler, more casual and informal services. So it is that for most of our Unitarian congregations the Sunday after Labor Day is kind of a “Resumption Sunday.”

Our Unitarian forebears—the ministers anyway—were somewhat enamored with the academic model that included time off during July and August for study and relaxation. That model has filtered down to today; roughly two-thirds of our UU churches and fellowships across the continent are having formal in-gathering services this morning.

Many—probably most—of them will include a water communion ceremony as we are going to do. However, this is a fairly recent development. Were you to happen upon a Unitarian or Universalist worship services 150 years ago it would look a lot different. More “Christian” for one thing—or look and feel a lot more that way. Our spiritual ancestors were liberals, all right, but they coalesced around what they called “pure religion”: love your neighbor, help and be kind to the poor, work for justice—that sort of thing. They tended to understand and express their religious faith in the language and metaphors of the Bible.

Over time, all this has changed. Growing cultural pluralism, the theory of Evolution, widespread compulsory education—all these and more have contributed to a new, more secular way of seeing and understanding the world. A worldview that most of share.

Coming up with connecting symbols and stories for folks like us to coalesce around was what led a group of UU feminist activists led by hymnist Carolyn McDade to create the first water communion at a continental Women and Religion convocation in East Lansing, Michigan thirty-five years ago. Carolyn McDade was the person who wrote “Spirit of Life” that we sing here every Sunday. Writing about it later, Carolyn wrote,

“We were beginning to reach for new and inclusive symbols and rituals that speak to us of our togetherness to one another, to the totality of life and to our place on the planet. We moved in an intuitive response to the potential of water’s presence and deep meaning in all our lives.” [“Coming Home Like Rivers to the Sea,” Carolyn McDade and Lucile Shuck Longview” in *Sacred Dimensions of Women’s Experiences*, ed. by Elizabeth Dodson Gray.]

No doubt our feminist UU foremothers of thirty-five years ago had been inspired by some of the same classical ideas expressed so noisily by our youth moments ago, sharing the sounds of water’s run from the mountains to the sea; trickles becoming gurgles and babbles and then rushing streams becoming great meandering rivers all the way to the

ocean. Like Carolyn McDadehe poetry of legendary Chinese sage Lao Tzu repeatedly points out and celebrates water's feminine aspect. "How like Tao is water, the profound and eternal female.

Similar imagery comes from the *Enuma elish*, a 4,000-year-old Mesopotamian creation story that—like Lao Tzu—antedates the Bible. Wherein all life is churned up and comes to birth out of the mingling of the *sea* and *fresh* waters where the Tigris and Euphrates empty into the Persian Gulf.

Creation legends, like the *Enuma elish*, are myths; i.e., picture imagery or *poems*. Poems about dynamics and energies that are happening all the time. In this case about how *creativity* happens: *from the mixing of everyone's energy* in a common vision and common goals.

That's what genuinely creative communities are all about. And, it's what everyone I've met here over the past month are hoping *the coming year* is all about at UUCF, as we think seriously about calling a full time minister.

There's something transformational—almost magical—about genuinely creative communities. How being part of them *gives energy back* to us even as we give of ourselves. Such communities are *synergistic*, a term made popular by the late neo-futuristic architect, sustainability advocate, and lifelong Unitarian R. Buckminster Fuller. A group is synergistic, Fuller held, when the whole is clearly and powerfully greater than the sum of its parts. Moreover, synergistic communities *nurture* and *support* the nascent creativity within each member. It's almost as though in joining hearts and forces we give one another *wings* to grow. And to be more creative, and collectively more culturally creative.

Let us pledge to be that way, and to encourage it among ourselves in the year ahead. And now let us now celebrate a here-and-now mythic re-mingling of energies here in our own unique UU synergistic home. Members are invited to come forward to pour a vial of water symbolic of your summer travels into the lovely vase that Marlies Worley has shared with us in the past and again this morning. I will add some water that Liz Heaton, our RE Director, saved from last year's water service, reminding us that we are a community of memory as well as a community of hope. And let me also add some water of my own from the waters of Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island where, last June, I attended the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly, the theme of which—Love Reaches Out—celebrated the good, creative work Unitarian Universalists are doing across the globe.

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And now: We celebrate the gathering of these waters, as we celebrate this community, gathered in the spirit of free inquiry, kindly support, and meaningful service as we being our 46<sup>th</sup> year together. May it be a good year! Amen.

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