



TOUCHSTONES

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Communion



Introduction to the Theme

Communion is a powerful word and a powerful concept, but many of us dismiss it because of the symbolism of the Christian ritual of Communion, especially given the Catholic Church teaching of transubstantiation in which the bread and the wine used in the sacrament of the Eucharist becomes, not merely symbolically, but in actual reality the body and blood of Jesus. This understanding of the Eucharist was not that of the early Christian Church. (See *Closing Paradise* on page two).

While our observance of Communion goes back to the beginning of Unitarianism and Universalism (see page four for a historical overview), the ritual has not enjoyed the status in our tradition that it

has enjoyed in other Protestant traditions. This makes sense given our liberal theology, which has tended to a low Christology that emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, and a high anthropology that focuses on human potential.

As we have moved away from traditional observances of communion, we have embraced communion as connection and fellowship. Rev. Ray Baughan, a Unitarian Universalist minister, wrote in 1965, "When people turn from the table where bread is broken and candles glow, be sure you have invited them not to your house, but to their own, and offered not your wisdom, but your love." And Unitarian Universalist minister Judy Deutsch wrote in 1974, "Our stay here is a communion. A communion of people with ideas and feelings to share and with time to learn the ideas and feelings of each other, a communion of people who are seeking to live their lives as fully as possible who welcome this opportunity to live with others, to learn from them, to teach them, who

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Communion & Deepening Connections

While the traditional practice of communion is not meaningful to most Unitarian Universalists, other meanings are consistent with the annual theme of "deepening connections." An ancient practice linked to communion is captured by the hospitality offered by Abraham and Sarah to three strangers. The admonition in Hebrews 13:1 was, "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." Communion is also a quality of enduring friendships and love in the sense of "union with." Further, in our congregations, communion is an important characteristic of beloved community as invite people to gather around the welcome table.

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Wisdom Story

Loaves and Fishes

Sophia Lyon Fahs, adapted

Jesus had not been speaking long—at least that is how it seemed to all who



were sitting on the hillside because they were so caught up in his stories and teachings, yet the afternoon shadows now began to creep over the hillside as the sun began to set, chilling the air.

Two of the disciples approached Jesus and said: "You must send the crowd away so that they can go into town before it is too late and buy food for themselves for their evening meal."

Jesus was shocked by what they were suggesting. It was as if they had never listened to his teachings about the Kingdom of God and the abundance that flows from faith. Jesus asked: "Is there a need for them to go away? Can we not give them food?" He knew that the people who were gathered would expect such a gesture of hospitality.

Philip could not believe what Jesus was asking. None of the disciples had much money. Didn't Jesus understand the reality of the situation? Phillip asked with frustration in his voice: "Shall we go and buy two hundred shillings' worth of bread and feed them?" Jesus had to know that they did not have that kind of

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Deepening Connections

Witness to Hospitality

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

money.

Jesus thought to himself, "Even Phillip does not have faith in the abundance and generosity and hospitality that is surely here among us?" "How many loaves do we have?" asked Jesus. All of the disciples looked down at the ground and held out empty hands. They had no bread.

A young boy, who was maybe eight years old, overheard Jesus's question and walked toward Jesus. "I have five loaves and two fishes. Please take them and share them with others. They are not enough, but, if you divide them, they will help to feed the people who are here."

Jesus smiled and thought to himself, "Of course, we will be led to our better selves by a child." Beckoning the boy to come nearer, Jesus lifted his arms and, in a strong voice, spoke a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the boy's generosity.

For a few moments, there was complete silence. Men and women looked wonderingly at each other as if to ask: "What are these few loaves and fishes among so many people?" They, too, had doubts about the abundance that, according to Jesus, was part of the Kingdom of God, even though they really wanted to believe and trust in what Jesus was teaching.

Slowly, however, others in the crowd who had brought baskets and bags containing food began to open them and remove the food. They had decided that they would follow the example of the young boy. Perhaps it still would not be enough, but they wanted to help. They shared generously with those who had not brought any food. Before long, everyone had eaten heartily and, though it was hard to believe, there was bread still untouched. The crowd seemed refreshed and lighter in spirits as their friendliness and fellowship grew.

Jesus was moved with compassion by the hospitality that he witnessed. This was true communion with all of these strangers bound together by generosity and thanksgiving.

Source: *Jesus, The Carpenter's Son*, Sophia Lyon Fahs

Paradise Lost

Crucifixion and Empire

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, co-authors of *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*, trace the history of the Eucharist within Christianity. They write, "The Eucharist in ancient churches was celebrated as the feast of life, not as the reenactment of a death. ...Members brought gifts to support the church and offered foods for the Eucharist meal. ...When the Eucharist liturgies referred to sacrifice, they called it 'bloodless,' which meant that prayer was their holy sacrifice.

"After blessing the offerings, the bishop called the people to 'lift up their hearts' and recited the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving, the Eucharist, [which literally means] ...giving thanks. ...Its beauty was a spiritual path that opened the heart."

Brock and Parker recount the shift that occurred in this ritual. They write, "A thousand years after Jesus, the brutal logic of empire twisted the celebration of his life into a perpetual reenactment of his death. ...Charlemagne [over 30 years] ...slaughtered all who resisted, destroyed shrines representing the Saxons' tree of life, and deported 10,000 Saxons from their land.

"...Charlemagne also imposed a Roman Eucharistic rite on Europe.... [in which] ...the consecrated elements were the material, historical body of Christ, and the bread and cup made the *crucified* blood and flesh of the Lord present.

"...Denying this would be heresy.

"...The ninth century's new focus on the crucified Christ coincided with a shift in the Christian prohibition against the shedding of human blood. ...At the dawn of the Holy Roman Empire, Christianity began to lose its grip on the sinfulness of killing.

"...Paradise was lost. ...We live now—within the dominant culture of the West—in the aftermath of the closing of paradise. We live with the legacy of militarism, racism, and exploitation of the earth and its peoples that has put paradise at risk."

Source: <http://www.uuworld.org/articles/early-christians-emphasized-paradise-not-crucifixion>

Souls Filled

Soup Kitchen Communion

Rev. Scotty McLennan

A church I used to belong to in inner-city Boston was located on what was called Meetinghouse Hill. People who knew what went on in the church, though, called it "Eating House Hill." The minister, Rev. Jim Allen, always had a huge pot of stew or chili or soup cooking on the stove in the kitchen and lots of fresh bread. Many people came by that church during the week asking for help paying their rent or utilities. They came to discuss problems with the welfare office or the Social Security Administration or local merchants. They came because their children had just been taken away for alleged neglect, or because they couldn't get health care, or because they were about to be deported as "illegal aliens."

This minister never passed the buck. He always seemed to provide cash when needed, and he got on the phone and called people he knew in the agencies and businesses with which people were having trouble. All the time he was laddling out stew and bread. Most of these people in need didn't come to church on Sunday and therefore didn't formally take communion, although some of them sent their children to Sunday school. No matter, though. They experienced communion. For half an hour or more they were able to come in out of the cold and find a warm and welcoming human face who asked them to break bread with him and the others who happened to be around that kitchen table each day. Not only did they fill their stomachs and get concrete assistance with their problem, they filled their souls. And privileged people like me did too, simply by being at that table.

Source: *Jesus Was a Liberal: Reclaiming Christianity for All*, Rev. Scotty McLennan



Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: "Empathy is an affinity, a communion, a comprehension."
C. JoyBell C.



Day 2: "The secret of a full life is to live and relate to others as if they might not be there tomorrow, as if you might not be there tomorrow. It eliminates the vice of procrastination, the sin of postponement, failed communications, failed communions." Anaïs Nin

Day 3: "In a true partnership, the kind that lasts through the ages, there is an unspoken communion." Cassandra Clare

Day 4: "He is one of those who has had the wilderness for a pillow, and called a star his brother. Alone. But loneliness can be a communion." Dag Hammarskjöld

Day 5: "Here and there does not matter. / We must be still and still moving / Into another intensity / For a further union, a deeper communion." T. S. Eliot

Day 6: "Empathy is an affinity, a communion, a comprehension." C. JoyBell C.

Day 7: "I think ...[religion] is an art, ...an extension of the communion all the other arts attempt." Dodie Smith

Day 8: "Happiness is home. ...It is a state of mind. A place of communion and unconditional love. It is where, when you cross its threshold, you finally feel at peace." Dennis Lehane

Day 9: "Finally, he said that among men there was no such communion as among horses and the notion that men can be understood at all was probably an illusion." Cormac McCarthy

Day 10: "...Here is the mystery of our global responsibility: that we are in communion with ...all people. ...If we want to be real peace-makers ...our primary concern ...should be survival of humanity, the survival of the planet, and the health of all people." Henri J.M. Nouwen

Day 11: "Our homes, imperfect as they are, must be a haven from the chaos outside ...where troubled souls find peace, weary hearts find rest, ...lonely pilgrims find communion, and wounded spirits find compassion." Jani Ortlund

Day 12: "There is almost a sensual longing for communion with others who have a large vision. The immense fulfillment of the friendship between those engaged in furthering the evolution of consciousness has a quality impossible to describe." Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Day 13: "The ocean was the best place, of course. ...It was a feeling of freedom like no other, and yet a feeling of communion with all the other places and creatures the water touched." Ann Brashares

Day 14: "The practice of forgiveness is not ...a way of dealing with guilt. Instead, its central goal is to reconcile, to restore communion ...with one another, and with the whole creation." L. Gregory Jones

Day 15: "Soul grows in communion. ... From true conversation... communication deepens into compassion and creates community." Sam Keen

Day 16: "Whoever moves within the forest can partake directly of sacredness, ...drink the sacred water as a living communion, ...open his eyes and witness the burning beauty of sacredness." Richard Nelson



Day 17: "Eating, and hospitality in general, is a communion, and any meal worth attending by yourself is improved by the multiples of those with whom it is shared." Jesse Browner

Day 18: "Faith is not knowledge of an object but communion with it." Nicolás Gómez Dávila

Day 19: "For mystics from the Abrahamic faiths..., the inward odyssey is also an upward odyssey, a quest for personal and vital communion with an infinite Being." David C. Downing

Day 20: "True communication is communion—the realization of oneness, which is love." Eckhart Tolle

Day 21: "The man or woman who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation yet is unable to enter into communion with the people, whom he or she continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived." Paulo Freire

Day 22: "...The effort to discover an authentic self, ...and find a soul in a clear, unimpeded communion with the sacred is consonant with spiritual quests throughout the ages." Cynthia Eller

Day 23: "My love affair with nature is so deep that I am not satisfied with being a mere onlooker, or nature tourist. I crave a more real and meaningful relationship... in which I have communion and fellowship with nature...." Euell Gibbons

Day 24: "To care means first of all to empty our own cup and to allow the other to come close to us. It means to take away the many barriers which prevent us from entering into communion with the other." Henri J.M. Nouwen

Day 25: "Commit to finding the true nature of art. ...Go for that communion, that real communion with your soul, and the discipline of expressing that communion with others." Anna Deavere Smith

Day 26: "...I ...know that eating a Hershey's Kiss is like an act of communion." Damien Echols

Day 27: "Love creates a communion with life. ...In any moment we can step beyond our small self and embrace each other as beloved parts of a whole." Jack Kornfield

Day 28: "They spoke of a communion so much vaster than any church could contain: one I had sensed all my life could be expressed in the sharing of food, particularly with strangers." Sara Miles

Day 29: "There is communion of more than our bodies when bread is broken and wine drunk." M.F.K. Fisher

Day 30: "The measure of your solitude is the measure of your capacity for communion." Henri J.M. Nouwen

Day 31: "The deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion." Tom Ryan



The Evolution of Communion Within Unitarian Universalism

Governor John Winthrop brought a communion cup from England to America in 1630, which he later gave to Boston's First Church. In New England, it was the custom to serve communion monthly. This sacrament was taken very seriously. Only church members were worthy of taking communion, yet after the 1650s, many members, feeling that they might be unworthy, decided not to take communion. David Hall explained, "when communion day occurred, a mere handful lingered in the meeting-house to celebrate the Lord's Supper."

In 1772, Dr. Charles Chauncy, a proto-Unitarian and minister of First Church in Boston, preached several sermons about communion. He was concerned that religion was languishing because so many people were opting out of the Lord's Supper. He exhorted people to participate, saying that "it will occasion joy to all the friends of Jesus."

Since many early Universalists came from either an Anglican and Methodist background, communion was included in their services. In 1782, Mrs. Judith Sargent Stevens of Gloucester, later to become the Rev. John Murray's second wife, published a Catechism, in which she discussed a Universalist view of the Lord's Supper. It was, she wrote, a sacrament of consolation in which "the scattered individuals of humanity" like grains of bread are gathered together in a profound union.

Still, given the diversity of religious backgrounds involved in Universalism as it grew and the corresponding diversity of opinions regarding the Lord's Supper, the Articles of Faith adopted in May 1790 in Philadelphia explicitly recognized this diversity and held that none of the ordinances (including communion) were required for members of churches.

In September 1832, Ralph Waldo Emerson preached a sermon at Second Church in Boston, where he had been the minister for 3-1/2 years. At the end of the sermon, he announced that he

was resigning. The topic of the sermon was the Lord's Supper, a ritual that he could no longer lead or participate in.

Emerson did not believe that Jesus intended the Last Supper to become a permanent and perpetual celebration with the meanings assigned to it. While Theodore Parker questioned the legitimacy of the Lord's Supper in his 1842 book, *A Discourse of Matters pertaining to Religion*, most Unitarian and Universalist ministers felt that the Lord's Supper was foundational to faith. This sentiment continued, mostly unquestioned, for another 70 years. As an example, the Rev. Orville Dewey, minister of the Church of the Messiah (Unitarian) in New York published *On the Uses of Communion* in



1841 in which he sought to invite greater participation in communion and make it much more prominent in worship.

Clayton R. Bowen, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Meadville Theological School, gave a lecture at the school's Summer Institute in 1914 entitled, *The Last Supper and the Lord's Supper*. In it, he rejected the claim that the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples was a Passover meal. For Bowen, it was not. He also rejected the material and sacramental practice of the Lord's Supper, calling instead for a ritual that focused on the memorial and fellowship aspects of the Last Supper.

In 1922, the Rev. Vincent Silliman, who had created a new communion liturgy, expressed his concern that Unitarians (and Universalists) had not fairly considered the eucharist, noting the absence of it in many churches and the significant lack of participation in churches where it was still observed. In his 1925 Meadville dissertation, *The Christian Eucharist. As It Might Be*

Celebrated in Congregational Unitarian Churches, Silliman called for the Eucharist to be reimagined as the *Festival of Brotherly Love* with an emphasis on themes like "gratitude and thanksgiving, fellowship and consecration" in place of the traditional imagery of the blood and body of Christ.

In 1937, the Unitarians and Universalists jointly published *Hymns of the Spirit: Services of Religion for Use in the Churches of the Free Spirit*, which included a short and long form of communion, reportedly written by the Rev. Von Ogden Vogt, Co-Editor of the hymnal.

In 1938, John W. Laws, a ministerial student at Meadville Theological School, wrote his dissertation. It was titled, *American Unitarian Eucharistic Faith*. His research included gathering information from Unitarian ministers. He mailed 200 questionnaires to ministers and received 100 back. Based on the responses, Laws concluded that Unitarian ministers had four objections to communion:

1. For some, the meaning of communion had been and/or seemed contrary to the genius of Unitarianism;
2. For others, it was too orthodox given the idea of symbolically consuming flesh and blood;
3. Like Emerson, some believed that Jesus never intended the Passover observance to be perpetual; and
4. Finally, there were those who considered communion too controversial.

While a few ministers promoted the practice of communion, the trend among Universalists and Unitarians was clearly moving away from practice and participation in communion.

At the time of merger in 1961 to create the UUA, it appeared that, but for a few congregations with a Christian orientation, communion was all but gone in our tradition. As an example, the hymnal, *Hymns for the Celebration of Life*, published in 1964, contained no communion services. And apart from the hymnal, there was not much focus on ritual or liturgy.

The Humiliati, a group of Universalist ministers and theological students, was active from 1945-1954. They sought to push Universalism beyond Christianity through new forms of worship and rites

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Family Matters

The Marvelous Loaves

The story, *The Marvelous Loaves*, by UU RE Director Beryl Aschenberg, First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee, is delightful and engaging. It is included in Michelle Richard's book, *Come into the Circle: Worshiping with Children*.

The baker of the marvelous loaves is



Grandpa Alan, a member of the Nottingham Unitarian Church. When he is asked about his bread recipe, he simply says, "The secret ingredient is LOVE."

Grandpa Alan always bakes a loaf for the church's annual Bread communion. Children and adults alike are incredulous. How can one loaf be enough? Grandpa Alan begins cutting the loaf with a bread knife, and as if by magic, the bread multiplies into 20 loaves. "It's a miracle," somebody called out. "Don't be ridiculous," Grandpa replied. "It is a sound mathematical principle."

The youth group was planning to serve food at a soup kitchen on the following Saturday. During coffee hour, Barbara, the Director of Religious Education, asked Grandpa if he would bring a loaf of bread to help feed the hungry. Grandpa Alan agreed.

Grandpa Alan met the youth at the soup kitchen with a homemade loaf of bread. There were SO many hungry people, the bread just kept multiplying. Well, a secret like that doesn't stay a secret for long. Grandpa Alan and his bread were featured on the six o'clock news, which is how the town sheriff learned about the marvelous bread.

The sheriff was not a nice person; in fact, he was a bully who was mean to everyone. When he saw the news, he knew that he had to get a loaf of the bread. That magical bread would be

worth a lot of money, and the sheriff loved money.

The sheriff went to Grandpa Alan's home and offered, then bargained, then threatened Grandpa Alan in order to get a loaf of the bread. Grandpa Alan refused saying, "You just don't understand. It won't work for you. Nothing personal, but there is a mathematical principle at work here." The sheriff wouldn't take no for an answer. He pushed past Grandpa Alan, went into the kitchen, took a loaf of bread, and returned to his home as fast as he could.

The sheriff began cutting the bread, dreaming of the riches that it would bring him. But the bread didn't multiply, instead it began dividing into slices and pieces and crumbs. Then the crumbs began dividing again and again until nothing of the bread was left.

As Grandpa Alan told everyone who asked, a sound mathematical principle controlled the bread and it was this:

Hatred Divides, Love Multiplies.

Source: Touchstones

Family Activity:

Baking and Sharing

Read the retelling of *The Marvelous Loaves* above. Then engage your children in baking cookies or something else to share with someone.

Frog and Toad

Amy Alznauer

A perpetually cheerful Frog pays a visit to Toad but finds Toad glum, sitting on his front porch.

"This is my sad time of day," says Toad, "when I wait for the mail to come."

"Why is that?" asks Frog.

"No one has ever sent me a letter. My mailbox is always empty. That is why waiting for the mail is a sad time for me."

Then Frog and Toad sit on the porch, feeling sad together.

Frog rescued the situation by running home, writing a letter to Toad, and sending it literally by snail mail. The little

Praise & Thanksgiving

A Theology of Communion

Rev. Marco Belletini

(In the following, Marco Belletini calls for a ritual that has both meaning and depth.)

My communion theology is broad at some points, narrow at others. Just "sharing" anything—stones, feathers, balloons—is not communion to me. However, I detest universal formulae, and don't think Bread, Wine, and the Last Supper must always be there to celebrate eucharistic (Christian) communion. A Flower "Communion" can be eucharistic, but often is not. To be eucharistic communion for me, three things must be there (in classical liturgical jargon):

1. *eucharistos*: praise and thanksgiving for good gifts (*eucharis*) in the present, including bread, wine, flowers or [the] enduring presence of Jesus (but this last is not absolutely necessary to me, which makes me a heretic of the first order, I'm sure).

2. *anamnesis*: retelling of the story; praise and thanksgiving for all past good gifts, including the "redeeming" lives of the christic prophets, whose stories are the living vine on which we graft our own coiled lives.

3. *epiklesis*: praise and thanksgiving for the coming future, which requires that we all change for the better ("repent" is the ancient word...). The Spirit is invoked to be present among us all so that we may take the good gifts of present and past and weave them into a future worthy of human dignity and for the delight and pleasure of the One who will only love and ever love and Who is Love. (This last "future" orientation is for me the most important. I think that simply "remembering" Jesus is dangerously sentimental; without a pledge (Latin: *sacramentum*) to the "Rule of God" all power in the rite leaks away at "Amen.")

These are the touchstones of my sacramental understandings. I realize this puts me squarely into a camp at odds with just about everyone, since I am so loose about this all, but my love for the eucharist is unquestionable.

Source: *The Communion Book*, edited by Carl Seaburg, 1993, UUMA.

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Connection. Community. Communion. Indeed.

(Continued from page 1)

welcome this opportunity to help them, to be helped by them, to have fun with them, and to love and be loved by them. A communion of people who—if they cannot welcome—at least recognize the need for struggle, for anguish, for disappointment, and for sorrow. And—who hope somehow to reach that ultimate commitment that will give their lives tremendous meaning.”

The Fellowship Movement, which began in 1948 to spread Unitarianism through the formation of small, lay-led groups, and continued to 1967 was aptly named. The word “fellowship” pointed to the importance of relationships. These fellowships stressed greater intimacy, spontaneity, and informality. They required more personal involvement. As one person said, “fellowship members ‘joined an experience’ rather than an institution.”

Fellowships did not observe communion, they embodied communion, which literally means “union with” and shares the same root as community. This embodiment of communion characterizes Unitarian Universalist congregations. Many joke by calling the coffee hour after the Sunday service our communion. Yet the ritual of the coffee hour is significant, connecting people week-in and week-out in their beloved community. It reinforces Deutsch’s assertion that our congregations are a communion of people. The experience of communion also underlies the sharing of joys and concerns that many congregations include in their worship service. This element is important to many congregants and newcomers alike. The term “joys and concerns” captures the yin and yang of the human condition. As Amy Alznauer writes, “Perfect joy could not be joy alone but must be a joy that somehow contains our past grief and sadness and longing.”

The breakdown of community in con-

temporary society is a distressing trend. It explains why newcomers say that they seek out a Unitarian Universalist congregation to find community.

Having moved beyond the traditional observance of communion, it is telling that our congregations embody commun-



ion. Perhaps it was natural given this embodiment that innovative communion services would be developed and embraced. Most notable in these are the Water Communion as part of the annual ingathering service, and the Flower Communion that happens in the springtime. Their use of elements

from nature, water and flowers respectively, point to wider and deeper communions. (See page 7.)

We are strangers all. We gather with the desire to belong. Pablo Neruda wrote, “everything is alive so that I can be alive:/ without moving I can see it all:/ in your life I see everything that lives.” Unitarian Universalist minister Jacob Trapp reminded us that, “Love is when persons exist for us/ with such intensity and such density/ that our lives are transformed/ because of what they are and speak to us/ from the depth of their mystery/ as we do to them.”

The invitation to each of us is to deepen our connections through communion with each other, and to make the strangers among us feel that they have come home, that they are part of our community.

M. Scott Peck observed, “Community is a safe place precisely because no one is attempting to heal or convert you, to fix you, to change you. Instead, the members accept you as you are. You are free to be you. And in being free, you are free to discard defenses, masks, disguises; free to seek your own psychological and spiritual health; free to become your whole and holy self.”

Connection. Community. Communion. Indeed.

A Communion of People

A Garden of Friendship

Rev. Max Coots

Let us give thanks for a bounty of people:
For children who are our second planting,
and though they grow like weeds
and the wind too soon blows them away,
may they forgive us our cultivation
and remember fondly where their roots are.

Let us give thanks:

For generous friends . . . with hearts as big
as hubbards (i.e., large winter squashes)
and smiles as bright as their blossoms,
For feisty friends, as tart as apples,
For continuous friends, who, like scallions
and cucumbers,
keep reminding us that we’ve had them.

For crotchety friends, as sour as rhubarb
and as indestructible,
For handsome friends, who are as gorgeous
as eggplants
and as elegant as a row of corn;
And the others, as plain as potatoes and as
good for you,
For funny friends, who are as silly as Brussels sprouts
and as amusing as Jerusalem artichokes,
And serious friends, as complex as cauliflower
and as intricate as onions.

For friends as unpretentious as cabbages,
As subtle as summer squash,
As persistent as parsley,
As delightful as dill,
As endless as zucchini,
And who, like parsnips,
can be counted on to see you through the winter.

For old friends, nodding like sunflowers in
the evening-time
And young friends coming on as fast as
radishes,

For loving friends, who wind around us
like tendrils and hold us,
despite our blights, wilts and witherings,
And, finally, for those friends now gone,
like gardens past that have been harvested,
but who fed us in their times that we might
have life thereafter.

For all these, we give thanks.

Source: <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2014/pov-prayers-of-thanks/>

From This We Live

Deeper Communion

The Flower Communion and Water Communion are powerful examples of reimagining communion.

Flower Communion

The Rev. Norbert Čapek, founder of the Unitarian Church in Prague, wanted to create a meaningful ritual that would bind the diverse members of his church closer together. He created the Flower Festival Service. It was first held on June 4, 1923. People were asked to bring a flower or even a twig. They placed the flowers in a large vase, an act of free will that connected them to the congregation. All of the flowers held together in the vase symbolized the diversity and beauty of the gathered church. At the end of the service, members took a flower different from the one they brought. The hymn by Joseph and Nathan Segal captures the dynamic of the Flower Communion: "From you I receive, to you I give, together we share, and from this we live."

This simple ceremony was brought to America by Maja Čapek in 1940, the wife of Dr. Čapek, and began to spread among Unitarian Universalist congregations. Dr. Čapek was executed at Dachau in 1942. This communion of flowers recognizes the freedom offered us by our liberal faith.

Water Communion

An early, and perhaps the first water communion, was held at the *Women and Religion Continental Convocation of Unitarian Universalists* in East Lansing, Michigan in November 1980, which was attended by approximately 350 women. It was created by activist Carolyn McDade and Unitarian Universalist leader Lucile Schuck Longview. The water communion was entitled, *Coming Home, Like Rivers to the Sea*. In her song, *Coming Home*, Carolyn McDade wrote, "We're coming home to the spirit in our soul. / We're coming home, and the healing makes us whole. / Like the rivers running to the sea / We're coming home, we're coming home."

As McDade recalled, "It was a strong service, about community taking pow-

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Communion Reclaimed & Reimagined

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology** of passage. Included in the materials they developed was a new order of communion.

In 1975, the Congregation of Abraxas was formed by Unitarian Universalist ministers and others who sought liturgical renewal. They created and published new worship materials. Abraxas was active for more than a decade. In 1980, Abraxas published *The Rites of Religion*. In it they defined communion as being "one in which the gratefulness for nature's liberal bounty is made manifest, to be sure, but it is also a liturgy of consecration to social issues; it is an affirmation of the communion of common flesh and blood that unites us all. It is a profoundly impious act, a daring common act of prophecy."

Of course, a revolutionary refashioning of communion had already begun at the borders of our faith. The Rev. Dr. Norbert Čapek, founder of the Unitarian Church in Prague, created the Flower Festival Service. It was first held on June 4, 1923. His wife, Maja Čapek, brought it to America in 1940, and it began to spread among Unitarian congregations, becoming known as the Flower Communion. Regrettably, in March 1941, Dr. Čapek and his daughter, Zora, age 29, were arrested by the Gestapo and taken to Pankrac Prison. Eventually, Zora was sent to Germany to be a forced laborer and Dr. Čapek was sent to Dachau, where he was gassed during October 1942. In a way, the Flower Communion has been the Čapek family's resurrection.

The Rev. Dr. Charles Joy was the commissioner for Europe of the newly founded Unitarian Service Committee (USC). He was sent to Lisbon, Portugal, to lead the office of the USC there. Lisbon was the only open port in the early 1940s for refugees trying to flee Europe. The USC worked to create documents for people so they could leave Europe. Joy was convinced that the documents needed a seal to make them look official. He reached out to Hans Deutsch, an Austrian refugee artist

working in Lisbon, and asked him to create one. The two-dimensional result was a flaming chalice, a very different use for the chalice cup of communion. From these desperate beginnings, the flaming chalice gradually became the iconic symbol for our faith.

The Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship (UUCF) was founded in Boston in 1945. Their commitment to cultivating a liberal Christianity congruent with Unitarian Universalism has prompted valuing both tradition and innovation. Their 1986 summer/fall combined journal edition, *Communion Services and Sermons*, offered a range of perspectives about communion. The journal noted that there were two basic meanings of Communion in liberal churches. The first was a commemoration of the Last Supper. The second was as a feast of Christian fellowship. They noted that the latter had gained in popularity over the former within our tradition.

A different kind of communion service was created by Carolyn McDade and Lucile Schuck Longview for a service at the *Women and Religion Continental Convocation of Unitarian Universalists* in November 1980. The water communion was entitled, *Coming Home, Like Rivers to the Sea*.

Like the Flower Communion, the Water Communion spread to many congregations for ingathering services as congregations returned from their summer programming. From there, the

spirit of creativity resulted in more and different communions from traditional approaches to those using stones, apples, cider, and more. Some 50 of these communion services were collected and included in *The Communion Book* that was edited by the Rev. Carl Seaburg and published 1993.

And so, communion, which had been rejected by most Unitarian Universalists, was reclaimed and reimagined in ways that have made it an important ritual in our faith.

Source: Touchstones



Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Communion

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: "We flourish in communion with each other.... There are no donors or receivers.... There are no relationships that are not reciprocal.... But freedom isn't something that is given. It is something very arduous, because nobody gives freedom to anyone else, no one frees another, nobody can even free himself all alone; ... [people] free themselves only in concert, in communion, collaborating on something wrong that they want to correct. There is an interesting theological parallel to this: no one saves ...[themselves] alone, because only in communion can we save ourselves—not save ourselves." *Paolo Freire*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page one.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: "Our physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being depends on our connections—both to the world of nature, and to our fellow humans. Spirituality for skeptics is about keeping alive that connective tissue that makes us who we are and enables us to imagine what we might yet become. *Rev. Dr. Kendyl Gibbons*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. Have you ever participated in a communion ritual? If yes, what was the experience like? What did it mean? If no, how do you understand the ritual?
2. What are the positive and negative connotations of the word "communion" for you?
3. As you think about community, what role might communion, broadly understood, play in strengthening and deepening community?
4. Taking the broadest understanding of communion as connection, what have been important experiences and settings of communion for you (e.g., nature)?
5. How can you cultivate the embodiment of communion within your congregation? And why should you?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison)

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*



Communion of Friendship

(Continued from page 5) **Family Matters**

snail brought it four days later.

Even though Toad saw Frog every day, he longed for the strangeness, the otherness of a letter, for something to come from out there and address him, "Dear Toad."

Is that the thrill I feel finding a letter from you in my box? The address of a friend is made into a physical fact and every letter an artifact of the otherwise invisible communion of friendship.

Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1240356-there-is-one-story-about-letters-a-perpetually-cheerful-frog>

Family Activity: *Snail Mail*

Since communion is connection, a wonderful way of connecting is by helping your children write a note to someone special.

Celebrating Connectedness

(Continued from page 7) **Deeper Communion** er...about creating a political and liberating theology." This "celebration of connectedness," as McDade called it, empowered women. "It was very moving, the women bringing water from places of spiritual importance." This ceremony was also designed to demonstrate solidarity with women globally, as women the world over traditionally draw and carry water. The justice dimensions of the water communion have been reinforced by the water concerns of the UU Ministry for Earth and the UU Service Committee.

The Water Communion has become an important ritual in congregations as a homecoming in which waters flow home to the sea.

Source: Touchstones

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