

## **Flower Communion**

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When I was in St. Augustine, Florida, a few months ago, I visited the First Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. I heard George McGovern speak. He was wonderful. I shook his hand. He is the son of a Methodist minister, and so he had the example of always preaching a sermon based on a verse or story in the Bible. So that's what he did. I decided that was a good idea, so I'm following that example, sort of.

### **I base this service on our first principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person.**

Flowers are very diverse, just as human beings are. They are almost everywhere on earth, as we are.

- Flowers have different colors, just as we have.
- Flowers are different sizes, just as we are.
- Flowers have different shapes, just as we have.
- Flowers have favorite places they thrive, just as we have.

Think about how flowers affect your life.

Here's one of my own personal favorites. I remember visiting my sister several of years ago. She showed me to my room, very modest, quite small, with old furniture, and somewhat crowded. There was a small rectangular table just inside by the door, about a foot deep, 3 feet long. There was a chair in front, so I could sit at the table and read or write. The table had just a few items on it. What caught my eye was a small vase with a single red rose. It was wonderful to see! A small touch that brightened the room. A welcoming sight. Something alive, fresh, and beautiful.

Flowers at births. Flowers at deaths. Flowers at special occasions, such as commencements and weddings. Flowers for a new home. Flowers as "thank you". For the last few years in the spring, Marvin McLarty has brought me a tulip. Because he wanted to.

Unitarian Universalism has blossomed like these flowers. We have roots in other religions, but we are not bound. Just as flowers have roots, but may be removed, transplanted, or reseed on their own. I'd like to see our church blossom and flower.

...the hope of creating a community that embraces any and all in its ranks, not by enforcing uniformity, but by embracing and celebrating diversity.

### **The inherent worth and dignity of every person.**

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For many years now, Unitarian Universalist churches around the globe have marked the beginning of summer with the celebration of community known as Flower Communion. In some ways it is a very simple ritual. We ask everyone to bring a blossom with them to the worship service and put it with the others in a vase. For those of you today who did not bring one, pretend you did. Identify a flower in the group, and call it your own.

This is how the ceremony goes.

- First, we bless the flowers.
- Next, we meditate on how we can be good partners to one another in religious community.
- At the end, everyone chooses a different flower to take home, symbolizing how in our religious community, we give to one another and receive from one another.

Flower Communion is a simple ritual, but it makes a profound statement about the mission of our faith and what we are trying to do here. It was created in 1923 by Norbert Capek, the founder of the Unitarian Church in Prague. Capek's congregation was very diverse - composed of come-outers from Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish congregations - people who, for whatever reason, felt constrained in mind or heart or spirit by the religion of their upbringing. People were also attracted to the church because of its emphasis on social justice and the worth of all human beings.

### **The inherent worth and dignity of every person.**

Capek believed that every person is an embodiment of God; that in every one of us God struggles for higher expression; and, that it was the destiny of human beings to be co-creators with God of a future of freedom and dignity for all people. Near the beginning of his ministry in Prague, Dr. Capek set out to intentionally devise a ritual that would symbolize the wide open embrace of Unitarianism and give concrete expression to the bold humanity-affirming community he was trying to create. As Capek wrote, "(With) liberty as our foundation. . .we accept each other as brothers and sisters without regard to class, race, or other distinction. . . - we belong together as one spiritual community."

### **The inherent worth and dignity of every person.**

And so Flower Communion was born, which the Prague church celebrated each year at the beginning of summer.

Because the Prague congregation was so diverse, and because, like all Unitarian churches it had no creed, it was not always easy to forge a sense of common purpose. But somehow, all those different individuals were able to build a religious community that in just twenty years grew to a membership of over 10,000 adults, the largest Unitarian congregation in the world.

Wow! Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could be that successful in Lubbock!! Why not? Too ambitious? How about Hendersonville, NC? Population 12,000. UU Adult membership 235 with 65 children.

When the Nazis took control of Prague in 1940, they found Dr. Capek's gospel of the inherent worth and beauty of every human person to be - as Nazi records reveal - "too dangerous to the Reich for him to be allowed to live." And so Dr. Capek was arrested and executed at Dachau, becoming a modern martyr to our faith.

But his message of hope and universal love lives on through Flower Communion, which celebrates not only our hopes for our immediate community but our vision of a future where compassion and justice are extended to all. When you select your flower at the end of the service, cherish it as a token of how, beginning here, in this religious community, we begin to build that world of our dreams.

Capek's faith was resolutely optimistic that human beings could evolve to higher consciousness and could choose to create a world of equality and justice. His faith sustained thousands of his compatriots during the darkness of the Nazi occupation and it enabled him to endure his own martyrdom with an equanimity and heroism confirmed by survivors of Dachau who knew him.

Though Capek was killed, his Flower Communion survived, and it spread. Just like wild flowers spread. It became a living symbol of our faith tradition, because it spoke to the vision of universal love that both Unitarians and Universalists had long professed. It spoke to the Unitarian Universalist dream of a world where everyone truly would be treated with dignity, respect, and justice.

### **The inherent worth and dignity of every person.**

This is what we are trying to do here, at our church, in Lubbock, Texas. Build community. Inside our church. Outside our church. We're on our way. We're not there yet. Our dreams are not yet a reality. But we are the heirs to Capek and to all those bold dreamers in our faith's history who envisioned a future where, no matter one's origins, no matter one's station in life, all could come together as one and, together, enjoy a bounty of blessings.

Capek's vision was bold. Our vision is bold. ....

**Our Vision:** We are Lubbock's leader in liberal religion, spiritual exploration, and rational inquiry.

**Our Mission:** Our mission is to promote the growth of Unitarian Universalism in Lubbock.

- We advocate and participate in our broader community to promote peace, social justice, mutual respect, and environmental stewardship.
- We are a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive liberal religious community which

celebrates personal growth, upholds universal values, and provides a safe shelter for those searching for truth and meaning.

Is this a radically new experiment for our church community? Can we do it? Are there times when it does become real? Can't you just taste it?

Things which might seem quite simple on their face, like Flower Communion, are nonetheless a portent of the community we can become.

- When we are singing together, carried as one, in song.
- When a deep and abiding peacefulness descends on this room in meditation.

And these things happen not just when we are together as one body, but also in smaller groups and one on one.

- When people facing serious illness are sustained, given courage by the loving concern of those they know here.
- A moment in our Religious Education program when a child has an experience of mystery and awe; feels part of a life force they cannot even name.
- An adult Intersections discussion where someone suddenly finds some things falling into place, grasps some answers to those deep questions they've been struggling with just about all their life.
- Working together to clean up the church for an event, or after an event, or clean out a room, or plant new flowers, or trim the trees and hedges.
- Raising over \$800 for our Pennies for Peace campaign, with a big contribution from our own children.
- And all those people who come through our doors who, for whatever reason, have felt constrained in mind or heart or spirit elsewhere, but who here feel welcomed, affirmed, for who they are, whoever they are.

So just as with the Flower Communion, there is more going on here than immediately meets the eye. There are moments when we feel it, when we get a glimpse of the abundance of life, of its large beauty. The possibility of wonderfulness! The glimpse may be fleeting sometimes. But even when absent to our sight, that abundance is always here, waiting for us to quite literally come home to our senses. And when we are able to find in this community the abundance we share as part of the beauty of the earth, then do we all become priests and prophets for that day when that abundance, that beauty, that joy will be common place for all earth and all her peoples.

### **The inherent worth and dignity of every person.**

To help us move toward that vision, let us be those who offer garlands instead of ashes, who speak and sing hymns of grateful praise.

- Now we bless the flowers. How do we do this?

- We admire these flowers and note how each blossom is uniquely beautiful, as is each person in this church. We notice, too, how beautiful the profusion of flowers - how each complements another, adding to the delight of our senses - how the bouquet is more than the sum of the individual flowers. And so it is with our community - together we are so much more than any one of us alone.
- We wish these flowers well, now, and later, when they are taken by someone here today.
- The flowers are now blessed.
- Let us now silently take a moment, and wish each other well, and think about how we can be good partners to one another in religious community.
- Now I invite everyone to please come forward, along the center aisle, and pick a flower to take home, a different one than the one you brought. This symbolizes how in religious community, we give to one another, and receive from one another. Please return to your seat using a side aisle.