

Meditation and Prayer (Sermon follows)

First Unitarian Church of Baltimore
September 7, 2008
The Reverend Lyn Oglesby, Ph.D.

Spirit of Life, God whom we call by many names, inspiration to goodness and mercy, we gather this beautiful morning to give thanks that we are together again, in community and compassion, energized and inspired to live better lives, to love our neighbors, and to care for those less fortunate. Each waking moment is filled with joy, sadness, challenges and opportunities. Each day, each waking moment we are faced with difficult decisions about the most ordinary events of life...how much to pay on this bill or that, how to respond to a cranky neighbor, how to communicate with a child who tries to shut us out. How to comport ourselves with a difficult boss or supervisor, how to keep up our learning so that we don't lose our edge, how to make time for each day's many tasks. How to resolve differences with a spouse or partner or lover. How to set priorities for how we live. How to reserve time for reflection and introspection. Let us face these human challenges with calm, knowing we are imperfect, and recognizing that we have human limitations, but vowing to use each waking moment of each day to good use and service.

Our hearts go out to those who are sick and unable to be with us here today, to those who are homebound or hospital-bound, to those who have lost loved ones, and to all those who are in pain. Let us promise ourselves to comfort the sick and helpless with a phone call, a visit, a note or a flower. Let us reach out and learn to love those who dislike us and who would do us harm.

Let us remember all those who suffered, helped, were injured or died in the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Let us meet evil with strength while

learning to forgive our enemies, and to build greater understanding among all differences in religious faiths, political persuasions, races, and cultures. And let us begin here at home, among those we see and work with as we go about the work of our church. Let us not simply proclaim our faith, but let us live our faith, grateful for the company and community we share.

Above all, let us remember that each day dawns with opportunities to serve and heal and to enhance our lives with knowledge and kindness to others. Let us use each day, each waking moment, for good and beauty.

Sermon
The Significance of Liturgy: Our Water Ceremony

Nearly a quarter of a century ago a group of women created the first Women in Religion Conference, and held it in East Lansing, Michigan. A large part of this story and some direct quotes, come from an account of the Water Service written by Eliza Blanchard, while she served as an intern for the Church of the Larger Fellowship. The women felt a need for women to be heard and given more opportunities for ministry in the Unitarian Universalist movement. Although women led our movement out west in the 19th century, when ministers known as “The Iowa Sisterhood” led the establishment of our faith in the Midwest, mainly in reaction to their rejection by the male hierarchy in the Unitarian tradition and the mal ministers’ unwillingness to serve on the frontier. But in later years, resistance to women in ministry and positions of influence in the movement rose again, and in the twentieth century, women once again found themselves left out of opportunities for ministry and positions of substance. So Unitarian Universalist women came together to have a conference to discuss their status and how best to move forward.

The Water Communion tradition began when the organizers of the conference invited two social activists, Carolyn McDade and Lucile Shuck Longview, to create a ritual for the Women and Religion Conference. Carolyn McDade as many of you know is the composer of Hymn #123, "Spirit of Life". McDade and Longview shared a vision of justice both for women and for the environment. They created a strong service, about community -- about creating a political and liberating theology."

In this "celebration of connectedness, water symbolized the birth waters, the cycles of moon, tides and women, and all the waters of this small blue planet. Each woman attending the conference was invited to bring a container of water to pour into a common vessel. The water ritual speaks to a deepening awareness of our solidarity with brothers and sisters all over the world who lack the most basic and precious resources. The ritual also speaks eloquently of our interdependence. Many, many Unitarian Universalist congregations have adopted this ritual to commemorate significant occasions.

Let us renew **our** vision. Let us renew **our** faith. Let us renew our commitment to social justice. The waters in this bowl will become one and made holy. These waters will become a sacred symbol of our unity and connection to one another as we work for truth, beauty, and justice. Once purified, the waters we bring together tonight will be used in many communal rituals through the year including our child dedications.

This ceremony and our sharing of memories and values signify and symbolize an even larger vision for our movement. We strive to become more generous with one another, to assume good will in our disagreements, to become more inclusive and to share with those who are marginalized and need our support. Let us enlarge our hearts and minds to enrich our selves, our congregation and true justice in the interdependent web of all existence.

Together, in community and covenant, we can become more than we are today. We can transform ourselves, our congregation, and our community. Let us welcome the stranger, engage our visitors, support one another, and reach for a higher level of living, reflection, being and action. Let our deeds, rather than our creeds, bind us together, for “we do not have to think alike to love alike. We do not have to think alike to walk together and work together.” Let us model love and community collaboration to one another and to the world. Can we do that? Yes, we can. Yes, we can.

Amen