

## **WATER COMMUNION & INGATHERING**

Obviously in this third year of drought here in California we are more conscious of the use and abuse of water, so I do want to assure you that no water molecules were harmed in the production of this service. And any water employed in today's service will be treated with respect and returned to its normal cycle of operation within a reasonable amount of time.

Of course life on earth would be almost impossible without the cycles of water that flow through the veins of people and animals, plants and flowers and trees. We are mostly water and would not long survive without regular replenishment of the water in our bodies. It is therefore tremendously significant that we symbolize our ingathering with the Water Communion.

Our church is like the basin of water that we fill during Water Communion from the shared offerings of collected waters and experiences. Our community thrives on the diversity and variety of experiences and ideas that we share, not just in Water Communion, but throughout the year and years as we gather together.

Hundreds of other Unitarian Universalist congregations share their own Water Communions and In-gatherings each year, many of them on this first Sunday after Labor Day. And while the UU Water Communion may not be an ancient ceremony, it recalls the many water celebrations of Ancient Religions and reminds us of our roots in the beliefs and realities of our planetary home.

Few UU congregations now take the summer off, as our New England Unitarian forebears typically did, but many of us have traveled to various places during the summer and most of us have taken a few

Sundays off from church, so it is still fitting that we celebrate this day as our In-Gathering! From whatever places and times and other things that kept us away from church, we now return to once again join in free religious community here together at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Stockton! We also welcome those newcomers that have joined us recently and hope that they may find this to be a safe and encouraging place to continue their spiritual and life journeys.

Each UU congregation draws its strength from its members, and each individual draws strength from the gathered community. We are not alone in the quest for wisdom and truth when we are part of a UU community, and our communities also draw strength from the UU Association of Congregations. We are connected as individuals and as congregations, drawn to seek answers to our own needs but called to work together to shape a better world. Together we do our best to meet the needs of each and throughout our association we seek to address the needs of all.

My own travels this summer were both enjoyable and tiring. On my way to and from General Assembly and in a separate weekend in Phoenix, I saw my children and grandchildren in Phoenix and New York, my exes, my brother, two cousins and several friends and colleagues. I reconnected with friends and relatives and colleagues in ways I may not often get to do again. I drove 7500 miles, going from coast to coast and back with swings north and south of the most direct route. I realized that I probably need to take trains and planes for future long trips, but I really enjoyed most of the days of travel. I was more aware of my energy levels than I had been before, but I still enjoy the journey physically and metaphysically!

After I returned from General Assembly this summer, I shared several sermons about our Principles, Tradition, and Values as both an introduction for newcomers and a reminder to all of why we gather. The text of most of those and earlier sermons are available on our church website, [stocktonuu.org](http://stocktonuu.org), and we are hoping to also have recordings

available soon. Feel free to share those sermons if you think they might be of interest to others. Invite friends to join us or point them at our website. There are too many people who could benefit from our community who are not aware of who we are and what we stand for. We cannot do all we could do if we don't reach the people who need us!

I was very pleased to see that our bright new rainbow flag has replaced the faded pastel flag, so we can again be known as the church on Pacific Avenue with the rainbow flag. This of course is just one of the ways we try to be welcoming and just one of the areas of our social justice outreach effort, but it is a significant statement to Stockton that we accept and value all persons.

Whether we traveled far or stayed home this summer, we are bound together by the water we share, not as a rigid block of beliefs frozen in time but more like a stew of water molecules and minerals enriched by our diverse individuality but also blending to make a rich and ever changing array of ideas and beliefs.

Sometimes water communion services have become travelogues of the places we have been, but these services are far richer when we can reflect on the things we have learned from our travels, the new awareness we have come to, the new realities we have experienced. When we can bring back a sense of meaning in the form of new understandings as we share our stories, that is when we can more richly benefit our community and our sisters and brothers in this congregation.

From Dream work, we know that psychologically and emotionally, waters often express the desire for going deeper, exploring and discovering that which is most essential to our being. In this service of water communion, I invite you to look deeply into your lives and experience, your journeys, to seek truth and wisdom for the path ahead. As individuals and as a community, we will face challenges this year, but we will have the strength of this community to support each of us and to help us along the way.

May these moments we have shared help to bring us closer together and may we find new insights for the days to come!

In these last few moments of sharing, I invite you to share the hopes, dreams, and new commitments that your travels and this time of ingathering have inspired you to offer to the congregation in this church year. What service can you offer this community during this year? What can you do to make this congregation stronger, our world better?

So may it be!