

WONDERINGS *on the theme of* COMMUNION



Communion was chosen as December's theme because it is a word that connotes the reciprocal act of giving and receiving...the spirit of the winter holiday season.

Here at the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough, we celebrate contemporary forms of communion...a water communion and a flower communion. But would it surprise you to know that Unitarians and Universalists have a long and deep relationship with Communion...with a capital C...the Eucharist?

There are many UU congregations that regularly participate in a bread and wine communion, much like, or even exactly like, a Christian sacrament. I suspect it hasn't been a practice for us here, simply because at the time of our founding (1961,) the Unitarian

Universalist identity was something 'more than' or 'beyond' Christianity.

The seeds of the Radical Reformation, our heritage, were planted at a time when Communion was available only to a select few. Czech reformer Jan Hus (1369–1415)¹ was condemned for giving the chalice to his congregants. After his execution by burning, his followers adopted the chalice as an important symbol of their movement. Our current UU chalice was inspired by Hus' story.

As I study this theme, I wonder. I wonder if practicing Communion would be beneficial for us. I believe there is great power in ritual. Ritual allows us to understand something by **DOING** rather than by **KNOWING**. Rituals contain meaning... we do them best when we lift up something of worth and are reminded of what matters to us.

So, what might communion mean for us? What values might communion...in whatever form...support and reinforce? Here are just a few that come to mind:

- A beloved community in which all are included
- The universality of love
- The beauty of mutuality
- A reminder that we really are **OF** each other
- The nearness of mystery
- The possibility of transformation
- The power and intimacy of engagement

The meanings are many, yet I know that some of us carry negative associations as well. This month, let us explore this theme, in all of its connotations, with openness and curiosity. Let us take, eat, and drink of its rich potentiality.

The table is ready.

~ Rev. Julie

com mu nion

noun \kə-'myü-nyən\

- 1: the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level;
 - 2: a close relationship with someone; or something; an intimate fellowship or rapport; common participation in a mental or emotional experience.
 - 3(capitalized): a Christian sacrament in which bread and wine are consecrated and shared.
- synonyms:* affinity, fellowship, kinship, friendship, fellow feeling, togetherness, closeness, harmony, understanding, rapport, connection, empathy, communication, unity

Next month's theme: **THE HOLY**

Do you have ideas for resources? A favourite novel, blog, poem, or movie? Maybe you've taken a photo or done some artwork for the front page? Email your suggestions to unitarianchurch@cogeco.net

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flaming_chalice

STORIES *about* COMMUNION

Gate A-4 ~ Naomi Shihab Nye

<http://davidkanigan.com/2014/11/16/gate-a-4/>

Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal, after learning my flight had been delayed four hours, I heard an announcement: "If anyone in the vicinity of Gate A-4 understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately." Well — one pauses these days. Gate A-4 was my own gate. I went there.

An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing. "Help," said the flight agent. "Talk to her. What is her problem? We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this."

I stooped to put my arm around the woman and spoke haltingly. "Shu-dow-a, shu-bid-uck, habibti? Stani schway, min fadlick, shu-bit-se-wee?" The minute she heard any words she knew, however poorly used, she stopped crying. She thought the flight had been cancelled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment the next day. I said, "No, we're fine, you'll get there, just late, who is picking you up? Let's call him."

We called her son, I spoke with him in English. I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane. She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out of course they had ten shared friends. Then I thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her? This all took up two hours.



She was laughing a lot by then. Telling about her life, patting my knee, answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade mamool cookies — little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts — from her bag and was offering them to all the women at the gate. To my amazement, not a single traveler declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the mom from California, the lovely woman from Laredo — we were all covered with the same powdered sugar.

And smiling. There is no better cookie.

Then the airline broke out free apple juice and two little girls from our flight ran around serving it and they were covered with powdered sugar too. And I noticed my new best friend — by now we were holding hands — had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country traveling tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and thought, This is the world I want to live in. The shared world. Not a single person in that gate — once the crying of confusion stopped — seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women too.

This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.

When I was studying for the ministry, one of the expectations was that each week, the entire community would attend chapel (the worship service). Although I had been a Unitarian Universalist for more than a decade, I was still healing from the pain of my fundamentalist past, and I had not yet mustered the courage to attend chapel in this United Methodist seminary. But with the support of three Unitarian Universalist friends, one Friday toward the end of the first semester, I dragged myself to worship.



I wasn't sure what kind of message I would hear, but it was a week before exams, and I hoped for a place where I could center myself, and find some internal spiritual resources for the days ahead. To my surprise, there was no sermon. It was early December, and the entire liturgy focused on Advent, ending with a celebration of the Eucharist. Now I had not attended a Christian communion for over 20 years, but I tried to approach it with an open mind.

The prayer began with these words: "We, who are the children of Abraham and Sarah..." I don't recall the rest of the sentence, because in a split second, my mind went blank. It simply refused to be present to this experience that was sacred for most others in attendance. I began to weep quietly at first-but a whimper soon turned to tears, then uncontrollable tears. My friends sat beside me trying to be supportive, but didn't have a clue what was so upsetting about that simple phrase: "We, who are the children of Abraham and Sarah..." The moment I heard those words, I felt the pain of exclusion.

My rational mind told me that I should not take it literally; that the statement was merely a symbolic reference to our Jewish and Christian heritage. But that rationale didn't help. I simply could not get beyond the complex dynamics of race and class and gender in the biblical story. I knew the story of Abraham and Sarah in the book of Genesis, but I also knew the story of Abraham and Hagar, an Egyptian woman whose ethnicity and social standing made her an outcast in ancient Israel, a stranger in a strange land.

As a woman of African heritage, I identified myself as one of Hagar's children... ■■■■

QUESTIONS *for reflection on* COMMUNION

- In what ways do you see communion expressed in these two very personal stories?
- Do you have a communion story? When in your life have you experienced communion?
- What elements would need to be present for you to achieve, or practice, communion?
- In what ways might an assumption that communion is possible be felt as exclusionary?
- How might you offer, or extend, the possibility of communion to others?

INSPIRATIONS *on* COMMUNION

Like when you sit in front of a fire in winter — you are just there in front of the fire. You don't have to be smart or anything. The fire warms you.
~ *Desmond Tutu*

Soul grows in communion. Word by word, story by story, for better or worse, we build our world. From true conversation - speaking and listening - communication deepens into compassion and creates community.

meetville.com

Sam Keen

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*

Faith is not knowledge of an object but communion with it.
~ *Nicolás Gómez Dávila*

True communication is communion - the realization of oneness, which is love. ~ *Eckhart Tolle*

Hot dogs and Communion at the Hope Rescue Mission. I will always think of the body of Christ now with this scene in mind. Doctors and housewives and professors in nice shoes and brightly colored sweaters shuffling to the table together with men and women who hadn't changed clothes for days or weeks. The sophisticated smell of after-shave mixed with the sharp scent of dirty socks and stale smoke. People whose lives seemed all together sharing the same loaf with people whose lives were broken and tattered. We were all one body, for we all ate from the same loaf. ~ *Leonard J. Vander Zee*

The measure of your solitude is the measure of your capacity for communion. ~ *Henri J.M. Nouwen*

Poetry is for me Eucharistic. You take someone else's suffering into your body, their passion comes into your body, and in doing that you commune, you take communion, you make a community with others.
~ *Mary Karr*

A Big Mac - the communion wafer of consumption.
~ *John Ralston Saul*

Rigel, Betelgeuse, and Orion. There was no finer church, no finer choir, than the stars speaking in silence to the many consumptives silently condemned, a legion upon the dark rooftops. The wind came down from the north like a runner in lacrosse, violent and hard, to batter every living thing. They were there, each one alone in conversation with the stars, mining ephemeral love from cold and distant light. ~ *Mark Helprin*

One person put it this way, 'If you want to get to know a Millennial, share a meal.' In other words, get to know them at an individual level.

~ *David Kinnaman*

All a musician can do is to get closer to the sources of nature, and so feel that he is in communion with the natural laws. ~ *John Coltrane*

Fishing provides that connection with the whole living world. It gives you the opportunity of being totally immersed, turning back into yourself in a good way. A form of meditation, some form of communion with levels of yourself that are deeper than the ordinary self. ~ *Ted Hughes*

Communion is not for perfect people but for hungry people.
~ *Greg Boyle*

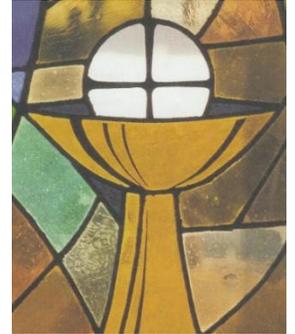
I was interested in transcendence from a very early age. I was interested in what was over there, what was behind life. So when I had my first communion I was very disappointed. I had expected something amazing and surprising and spiritual. Instead all I got was a bicycle. That wasn't what I was after at all. ~ *Anselm Kiefer*

Music is the most natural thing in the world. When we go to a gig and we all like it and we share that experience, it's the same sense of communion as a sacred rite in Borneo or wherever it may be; it just gets dressed up different. It's good for the soul. ~ *Paul Weller*

Reading is a majority skill but a minority art. Yet nothing can replace the exact, complicated, subtle communion between absent author and entranced, present reader.
~ *Julian Barnes*

PRACTICING COMMUNION

1. We know that consumption/materialism is often fueled by a desire to be happy. But, in a sermon about happiness (<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermons/183421.shtml>), the Rev. Scott Alexander compares consumption and communion, saying that authentic and enduring happiness is RELATIONAL. Therefore, it is communion, not consumption, that can make available to us most of what is truly rewarding in life. Make an experiment of this premise. When you are feeling the urge to consume, look for ways to commune instead.
2. Create your own communion ritual. You might start with gathering your thoughts about what communion means to you, and what you would want a ritual to reinforce. With who or what do you want to commune (each other, nature, the world, the great mystery...) What elements/objects/ symbols might help you to honour that connection? What words or actions would best represent the meaning? Who would you invite? If you're feeling very courageous, invite some people to 'take communion' with you.
3. Synonyms for the word communion include affinity, fellowship, kinship, friendship, togetherness, closeness, harmony, understanding, rapport, connection, communication, empathy, and unity. See if you can bring the word 'communion' into your vocabulary. Where might you use this word in your everyday conversation?
4. Chose one of the quotes in this packet and place it on your dinner table. Read it aloud each time you sit down to eat. Ponder what it means. Let it remind you, and those with whom you eat, that every meal is a communion.



Resources on COMMUNION

On the Web

A blog exploring the meanings of the Eucharist using the movie *Places in the Heart*.

<http://southernorderspage.blogspot.ca/2011/12/blog-post.html>

The Grateful Dead, *The Stranger (Two Souls in Communion)* by Ron "Pigpen" McKernan.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULuyNXr_c1Q

Communion with Nature using Interspecies Communication

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_mIOfB4Rug

James Ford's blog about UU Communion:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/monkeymind/2009/01/communion-in-unitarian-universalist-congregations.html>

Communion with Nature/Video Art:

<http://vimeo.com/63384862>

Books

The Communion Book, Carl Seaburg, ed.

The Sacred Meal: The Ancient Practices Series by Nora Gallagher

From Beginning to End by Robert Fulghum

Original Blessing by Matthew Fox

A Path with Heart: A Guide through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life by Jack Kornfield



Chalice Lighting *on* COMMUNION

We come together to remind one another to rest for a moment on the forming edge of our lives, to resist the headlong tumble into the next moment, until we claim for ourselves awareness and gratitude, taking the time to look into one another's faces and to see there communion: the reflection of our own eyes. May our laughter and silence, our memory and hope, be hallowed by the light of this flame.

-- Rev. Kathleen McTigue (adapted)

Movies

- *Communion, A True Story* (1989, R) A man takes a terrifying journey into the unknown.
- *Smoke Signals* (1998, PG13) Story of a young Indian man trying to forgive his father. Contains a great feast scene with Eucharistic overtones.
- *Soul Food* (1997, R) When the hospitalization of the family matriarch threatens to tear the family apart, her grandson cooks up a scheme to bring the family back to the table.
- *Sling Blade* (1996, R) Karl [a Christ figure] accepts an invitation to dinner which parallels the Lukan portrait of Jesus' dining with 'sinners.'
- *Phenomenon* (1996, PG) In one scene, the lead character shares an apple with some children, explaining how once you eat the apple it becomes a part of you.
- *Eat Drink Man Woman (Yinshi nan nu)* (1994, unrated) Life in the house of a master chef revolves around the ritual of an elaborate dinner each Sunday.
- *Like Water for Chocolat (Como agua para chocolate)* (1992, R) The transformation power of food.
- *Babbette's Feast* (1987, G) A beautifully prepared banquet reconciles relationships in a community.
- *Places in the Heart* (1984, PG) Race relations threaten a small town. In a culminating scene, they take communion together.

Table Grace *on* COMMUNION

Spirit of Life and of Love,
Deep down we know
that there is a greater mystery,
a life and a pulse with which we are all connected.
We know that our lives are happier, healthier and
more satisfying when we reach out to this
connection. As we gather at this table, may we
take time to remember those connections,
offering up our gratitude for all the gifts with
which we have been blessed:
for the beautiful world in which we live,
for family and friends with whom we share our
lives,
for food on our plates and roofs over our heads,
for all those things that make life abundant.
And out of gratitude for that abundance, may we,
in turn, be channels of love and mercy.
Amen.

Children's Books *on* COMMUNION

The Greatest Table by Michael Rosen
Whoever You Are by Mem Fox
*The Unity Tree: A Whimsical Muse on Cosmic
Consciousness* by Jennifer Sodini
All I See Is Part of Me by Chara Curtis
Christmas Cookies: Bite-Size Holiday Lessons by
Amy K Rosenthal
Soup Day by Melissa Iwai

*Thanks to all who helped create this packet by writing text, suggesting resources, offering artwork, sharing their words, and providing feedback! We subscribe to "Soul Matters" a curriculum from Rev. Scott Taylor. Service Leaders and Covenant Group Facilitators work with Rev. Julie Stoneberg to incorporate the theme into our programming & Sunday Services.
Would you like to share your talents?*

The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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Sunday Service at 10am