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○ SEPT/OCT. | ○ 2010

Stevens Point Unitarian Universalist *fellowship*

The Soft Power of Water

A Sermon About Water Communion by UU Rev. Stephen A. Landale,
Minister of The Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene

I've heard it said that trying to get a roomful of Unitarian Universalists to agree on something is like trying to herd cats. So I've been reflecting on the small miracle that is the water communion – a September ritual adopted freely by most UU congregations.

Why do we do this? Why does it seem fitting to begin our church year by taking water from places of meaning in our individual lives, and pool these waters together in a common basin?

While we have a broad range of theological outlooks in our tradition, we seem to be agreed, despite our feisty feline-ness, on the importance of nature and community. We find in nature beauty in itself, as well as a language for our spiritual lives, feeding our religious imaginations. We find in community an expression of our values. The water communion unites the two: we gather together, in the context of a worship service, waters from special places in our lives, and we use this as our holy water for child blessings and other passages.

In other traditions, holy water is that which has been blessed by an intermediary: the blessing comes from on high. In our tradition, holy water is that which comes from each of us, from the sacred and the ordinary of our lives, offered in the service of the whole. The blessings come from the earth, from our moments of deep connection with life. I suppose we could bring something other than water for this ritual – a pinch of soil, for instance. But we bring water. Water is a symbol of life. And, as Taoism reminds us, water is a symbol of a special kind of power, a soft power, a way of being in the world. This soft power might be named “The Tao” or “The Way,” but ultimately it is beyond all naming and understanding.

Which is stronger, a big boulder or a little river? Pile rocks or boulders in a stream, and the water has to change its course. Build a dam, and the river becomes a lake. So the boulder may seem to be strong, and the river weak. But water is fluid, shifting course – it moves around the rock, seeps underneath the rock, or even rises in the air to be carried by the wind as a cloud. Water keeps flowing, in one form or another. And over time, it slowly changes everything around it. It flows around boulders, smoothing them. It digs into the ground, creating gorges and waterfalls. It laps seashores into cliffs; it makes the ground a deep, rich brown and the plants a life-filled green. Taoism teaches us, be like water. Be fluid rather than rigid. Let your strength include yielding.

The Stevens Point Unitarian Universalist Fellowship will kick off our year and welcome members, visitors, and friends with a Water Communion and Pot Luck on Sunday, September 12 at 10 a.m. The Water Communion, also sometimes called Water Ceremony, was first used at a Unitarian Universalist worship service in the 1980s. Many UU congregations now hold a Water Communion once a year, often at the beginning of the new church year (September).

Members bring to the service a small amount of water from a place that is special to them. During the appointed time in the service, people one by one pour their water together into a large bowl. As the water is added, the person who brought it tells why this water is special to them. The combined water is symbolic of our shared faith coming from many different sources.

We look forward to seeing you at our Water Communion and Pot Luck on September 12!

Welcoming Congregation: LGBT Symbols

On September 26, Jan Nitz will be presenting a Welcoming Congregation service on LGBT symbolism. This is an important aspect of being an ally! As a warm up, here is one example of a symbol and its meaning to the LGBT community. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_symbols#Lambda)

One symbol which continues to remain popular is the lower case Greek letter [lambda](#). The symbol was originally chosen by the [Gay Activists Alliance](#) of New York in 1970. The GAA was a group which broke away from the larger Gay Liberation Front at the end of 1969, only six months after its foundation in response to the Stonewall Riots. While the GLF wanted to work side by side with the black and women's liberation movements to gain unity and acceptance, the GAA wanted to focus their efforts more concisely on only Gay and Lesbian issues.

Because of its official adoption by the GAA, which sponsored public events for the gay community, the lambda soon became a quick way for the members of the gay community to identify each other. The reasoning was that the lambda would easily be mistaken for a college fraternity symbol and ignored by the majority of the population. Eventually, though, the GAA headquarters was torched by an arsonist, destroying not only the building but all of the organization's records, and the movement never recovered from the loss. The symbol, however, lived on.



Community Collections

Our fellowship is dedicated to supporting community organizations and projects who are making a difference. Our fellowship designates the second and fourth (and fifth) Sunday of every month to collecting for the community.

Community collections are a way for our fellowship to practice and live almost all of the seven principles in one way or another. Our support can help to build a more free and just world, honor the inherent worth and dignity of people, honor the earth, and practice justice, equity, and compassion.

Our September community collections are for Empty Bowls and Oxford House for Women.

Empty Bowls is a project of the Portage County Hunger and Poverty Prevention Partnership. All of the funds raised from Empty Bowls is used for community projects that work towards alleviating hunger and poverty right here in our community. Some benefactors include the Mobile Food Pantry and the Community Gardens. Empty Bowls participants pay \$10 and receive a hand painted bowl to keep, a lunch of soup, bread, and cookies donated by local restaurants, and enjoy entertainment, a raffle, and information booths. The Empty Bowls event is Saturday, October 16 from 11 a.m.—1:30 p.m. at SPASH. Volunteers are also needed! For more information, visit <http://emptybowlsportageco.com/>

The Oxford House is something new that the United Way in Portage County is supporting. It is a safe, substance-free place to stay for women while in recovery from substance abuse. From the United Way's web site: "Currently, Portage County has no transitional housing that meets the needs of women in recovery. While the model is self-funded once fully operational with members responsible for paying the rent, donations are needed to help off-set the start up costs of this operation." For more information, read the United Way's press release at <http://www.unitedwaypoco.org/>

Do you have a suggestion for a community collection? Email Julia, Social Action Committee Chair, at weiserj@charter.net.



SPUUFers painting bowls that will be donated to Empty Bowls!



Building Work Days

A big thank you goes out to all who helped with SPUUF's building work days over the summer. There is still some work to be done before we begin services on September 12. If you can help out, please email Carol at cweston@charter.net.

Thursday, September 9th 9 AM – 1 PM

Friday, September 10th 9 AM – 1 PM

UUSC's Experiential Learning Trips

Witness to a Return Home: A Trip to Uganda, November 4–16

Participants will learn about UUSC's unique eye-to-eye partnership with Caritas Pader, which has empowered thousands of people to return to their villages and rebuild their lives after a brutal 20-year civil war. Participants will also meet with the UU Kampala congregation; talk with Ugandan leaders of the struggle for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people's rights; and visit the school and orphanage the Kampala congregation supports near Masaka. Early registration discount end on September 1. [Find out more and download an application.](#)

Haiti Volunteer Program, 2011 and beyond

Join us in supporting our partners in their work to rebuild Haiti and ensure a just recovery for all Haitians. Our goal is to begin these volunteer trips in January 2011. Interested in participating? [Let us know!](#)

General Assembly Social Actions

The 2010 Statement of Conscience passed at the General Assembly this year was "Creating Peace." It begins with the following opening statement:

"We believe all people share a moral responsibility to create peace. Mindful of both our rich heritage and our past failures to prevent war, and enriched by our present diversity of experience and perspective, we commit ourselves to a radically inclusive and transformative approach to peace."

The document in its entirety can be found at:

<http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/socialjustice/statements/13394.shtml>

"Immigration as a Moral Issue" was voted as the Congregational Study and Action issue for the next four years. It is available at <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issuesprocess/currentissues/152647.shtml>

Over the next four years it is suggested that our Fellowship study immigration. The UUA has provided a listing of topics of study that can help provide direction for an adult study group. If members of our Fellowship are interested in meeting, we could organize a group to investigate and learn possible action steps on this issue.

Actions of Immediate Witness that were passed at this year's General Assembly were:

[Clean Up the Clean Energy Bill](#)

[Gulf Coast Environmental and Economic Justice 2010](#)

[Oppose Anti-Immigrant Measures at the State Level \(Arizona Law SB 1070 and the Like\) and Hasten Federal Immigration Reform](#)

Priority Social Justice Issues that previously were established by the UUA and continue to be a focus of actions are:

[Bisexual Gay Lesbian Transgender Equality](#)

[Environmental Justice](#)

[Immigration Justice](#)

[Reproductive Justice](#), with a focus on [Comprehensive Sex Education](#)

Social justice action has been the bedrock of the UUA since its inception. As you can see, the tradition continues.

Thank you to Carol Weston for compiling and submitting this information!

Get Involved!

Unitarian Universalist congregations need the participation and leadership of all their members to thrive. The opportunities for your deeper involvement are limitless! Join a committee, volunteer to assist with a service, lead an RE class, lend your skills and passion!





Fall Service Schedule

STEVENS POINT
UNITARIAN
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FELLOWSHIP

Up-to-date information about services can be found at www.spuuf.org.



- September 12**—Potluck/Water Communion
- September 19**—*Life's Persistent Questions*, Rev. Glenda Walker
- September 26**—*GLBT Symbolism*, Jan Nitz
- October 3**—*Casting Jesus*, Richard Olson
- October 10**—TBA, Rev. Scott Prinster
- October 17**—*Religious Humanism*, Jim Coakley
- October 24**—TBA
- October 31**—*Intergenerational Service—Halloween*
- November 7**—TBA, Rev. Ralph Tyksinski
- November 14**—TBA, Fizza Razvi
- November 21**—*Guest at Your Table*, Intergenerational
- November 28**—TBA
- December 5**—TBA
- December 12**—*Natural Disasters or Acts of God: a Philosophical Perspective*, David Williams
- December 19**—*Winter Holidays*, Intergenerational
- December 26**—No Service

Services are held at the Stevens Point Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, located at 3116 Algoma Street, Stevens Point, 54481. Services begin at 10:00 a.m.

Child care and Religious Exploration classes for children are available.

Visit www.spuuf.org for more information.

Do you have an idea for a service or would you like to present a service? Email Shannon at shannonw901@gmail.com!

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
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The Uncommon Denomination