

“Water Uniting Us”
By Rev. Duffy Peet

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It is a tradition at many UU congregations across the country to hold what is commonly referred to as a “Water Ceremony” or a “Water Communion” service around this time every year. We have such a tradition here at UUFB. This Fellowship has been holding a “Water Ceremony” service for at least 10 years and probably longer than that. Those of you who have been attending this Fellowship for a while are familiar with this service and many of you probably know a bit about its history. For those of you who have been here only a short time, as well as those who are visiting us for the first time today, it is quite likely that this is your first experience with such a service. I would encourage you to read the insert in your Order of Service titled “A Brief History of the Water Ceremony Service.” It tells a bit about this service originated. For those of you who have attended the “Water Ceremony” services here in the past, I want to inform you that this year will be somewhat different. So if you have been attending UUFB for many years, I encourage you to let go of your expectations and engage in this “Water Communion” as if it is your first one.

While thinking about this service some weeks ago I began considering how this ceremony became a popular tradition in UU congregations across the country. As I was pondering the way this service spread, beginning with the original service in 1980, and then from one congregation to another, I recalled the story by Rev. Dr. Lynn Unger that Sandy had us participate in earlier. I imagined the spread of this service was very similar to what she described. From what I have been told, there is similarity between the water in that story and the way this service spread across UU land. At first it was like a gentle drizzle as a small number of congregations some distance from one another held their first Water Communion. In time, as people experienced these services and felt the wonder, the joy, and the renewal that water brings to life and to each of us, more and more congregations added their own “Water Ceremony” service. Each and every service had its commonality with the other water services and each had its unique aspects, just like every snowflake that falls is unique from every other snowflake. I imagine the spread of enthusiasm about this service was like what we heard in the story *Come On, Rain!* People everywhere want to dance and rejoice in the life giving and life affirming water that is in us and around us. This service provides an opportunity to honor the water that makes our life possible, as well as the water that has special meaning to us.

It is estimated that up to 60% of each one of us is water. Each of us carries our own particular water in our body wherever we go. None of us keeps that specific water for very long however. As I get older I recognize that I carry my particular water for less and less time every day. What this means is our particular water, very much like a particular rain drop, flows together with other drops to form puddles, trickles, babbling brooks, streams, rivers and oceans. Today I would like us to engage in an activity that recognizes both the separateness of our special water as well as its commonality with the water of others who are present today.

To begin this activity I would ask you to think about water that has special meaning to you today. Some of you brought some special water with you. Some of you may have intended to bring some special water with you. And others of you may have been unaware that bringing water was a part of this service. Whether you brought water or not, you can participate in what we are about to do because I am sure all of us have some memories of special water experiences from recent months. So I invite you to think of some special water. And as you do so, recognize specifics about it. In other words, think about the story details that are particular to that water. Now that you have the specific story elements of your water in mind we can discover the commonalities of our water and our stories. If your special water came from Montana either stand up or raise your hand. Look around and notice the people who have water with this same attribute. Now, if your water came from another state in the U.S. stand up or raise your hand. Again, look around. If your water came from another country, stand up or raise your hand. Hopefully everyone now has a sense of how this process of sharing works. Now let's consider a different characteristic of our waters. How many of you are thinking of or have special water from a lake or pond? How about flowing water, such as a creek, a stream, a river, or even a faucet? Any ocean water? Okay, was this special water something you shared with family members—friends—strangers? Was this special water enjoyed and appreciated alone, in solitude? There are so many different attributes of our water that we could share and compare with one another that we could go on and on with this activity—but I will end it here. My hope is that after our service today this activity will stimulate each of you to have conversations with others about their water. And as we share about our water I would ask us all to remember that the water we think of as ours today will be considered by another to be theirs tomorrow. Water unites us because it flows in us, through us and between us every day of our lives.

In just a few moments we will begin uniting our waters. Even if you didn't bring water today, you can still participate in this ceremony. We have water in the pitcher on the table that you can use to represent the water you would like to have brought. All of the water will be added to the larger community bowl. Pouring water into the community bowl represents our kinship—not only with one another but with all life.

In our service this morning, we honor the water and the story of life and of lives it holds.

Blessed be.