Blessing the Beginnings:
Water Communion & Ingathering Sunday
UU Fellowship of Santa Cruz County
September 13, 2026

Selected worship texts

Chalice Lighting

Welcome to our water communion Sunday,
this annual ritual to celebrate the start of a new congregational year,
to regather and renew ourselves as a community.

Later in our service, we'll invite everyone to participate in the water communion by pouring water into a common bowl,
or for our Zoom congregation, pouring water into a vessel
to be released into the watershed wherever you are.
Honoring our connection to all that is
through the waters that have been flowing since Earth was young.

And now we light the chalice with these words
adapted from Dr. David Breeden:

As if expecting a ship,
we wait for what is to be,
yet we do not begin alone.
The Ancestors lean in….

Bless the beginning
though it does not arrive clean; …

Bless the beginning
not because it's easy;
not because we are ready;
but because a path
creates the path.

The world is not finished.
Neither are we.
Let us begin again.

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Time for All Ages

One of the coolest things about Blue Boat Home
is that the melody sounds pretty contemporary,
but it's actually over 200 years old.
The guy who wrote it, Peter Mayer, who by the way is just the most lovely, sweet person, took this hymn tune from Wales called Hyfrydol and basically turned it into a folk song.

Sometimes we still sing it the old-fashioned way,
like in Hymn #140:
"Hail the glorious golden city, pictured by the seers of old"

Peter Mayer turned that into this:
"Though below me I feel no motion
standing on these oceans and planes"

And the second part originally went like this:
"Wrong is banished from its borders;
Justice reigns supreme o'er all."

But Peter Mayer turned that into this:
"The wide universe is the ocean I travel
and the earth is my blue boat home."

And I've been thinking about
how this is exactly how religious community works over time!
We inherit all these traditions

that have been so meaningful to the people who came before us,
and sometimes we keep them just the way they were,
but sometimes we mix it up a little,
we take something old and traditional
and we make it fresh,
we make it our own,
because the river of life doesn't stand still,
it keeps moving, and so do we.

So as we begin this new congregational year,
let's celebrate all the good that we've inherited,
and all the ways we've made it our own,
and all the ways life continues to call us on and on and on.
May it be so.

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Board Commissioning

In Unitarian Universalist congregations,
the congregation gives authority to its elected leaders
to carry out particular duties for the good of the whole.
And today, we give our blessings to our elected board members
for the ministry they will provide in the coming year.

Members of the board,
I invite you to come forward as I call your names.

Continuing on the board are Joe Griffin, Board president,
and Carole Griffin, trustee.
New to the board this year are Wendy Wyckoff, vice president;
Liz Villalobos, secretary; Carol Schimke, treasurer,
and Steve Sandis, trustee.

Would the congregation join in reading the words of thanks printed on the slide:

Congregation:
To you who have accepted the call to serve as leaders, we pledge to you our trust and support.
We ask you to lead on our behalf, and we promise to support you and share with you openly and honestly.
We thank you for the many hours of care and attention you give to our congregation.
And we will join with you in efforts to serve our mission and our values. Thank you.

Rev. Laura: Would the board please respond by reading the words on the slide:

Members of the Board:
Mindful of your trust, and of the responsibility inherent in this role, we promise to do our very best in this ministry of leadership.
With gratitude, we accept your support.
We go forward together with you.

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Joys & Sorrows

Each week in this community, we share the deep joys and sorrows that are moving in our hearts, for ourselves and our loved ones.

We begin with two candles for the world.
The first, commemorating 25 years
since that morning of September 11, 2001
when this country changed forever.

Today we remember the lives lost on 9/11,
and in the long wars that have come after.

And the second candle, honoring the beginning of Rosh Hashanah,
the Jewish New Year, tonight.
L'shanah tovah, a good new year, to our many Jewish members,
friends, and neighbors. Our hearts are with you,
even as we also declare our solidarity with the Palestinians
of Gaza and the West Bank who continue to suffer
through the catastrophic violence
perpetuated by the Israeli government.
We light this candle
for everyone who continues to dream of peace
and work for an end to violence.

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Reflection Blessing the Beginnings

The Spanish poet Antonio Machado writes:

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that a spring was breaking
out in my heart.
I said: Along which secret aqueduct,
Oh water, are you coming to me,
water of a new life
that I have never drunk?[1]

Traditionally in this congregation
and in UU congregations around the country,
this time of year is when we kick off a fresh congregational year.
New energy, new ideas, new beginnings.
And today I want to invite us into blessing something new here:

our new working group on Family Ministry,
that's been charged to experiment
with new ways of welcoming families and kids into our fellowship.
I want to talk about family ministry in particular
because there's been some tenderness and even sadness
about how things have been since Covid hit.

Before Covid, it was before my time, but I've heard lots of stories
about the thriving religious education program
where kids and families could get to know each other,
learn about what it means to be a UU,
and get support for being kind to each other, living a good life,
and making a positive difference in the world.

But then the pandemic hit,
and like so many other congregations all across the country,
the religious education program here collapsed.
It wasn't anyone's fault.
It's just what happened.

When I arrived a little over 2 years ago,
I heard from folks here a lot of sadness over what had been lost.
You missed having more kids around.
You remembered how important the religious education program was
to the kids who had been a part of it.
I even heard some shame
from folks who felt like you'd failed somehow,
and now there was this big gaping hole in the congregation,
and it didn't feel good.
Dedicated folks had done their best to get things going again,
but somehow the time wasn't right.

But last year,
we started talking about we could
build something for kids and families *today*.

A few of us started going to trainings
about new trends in religious education,
or faith development, as people tend to call it now,
so we could maybe begin to imagine what it could look like *now*.

And the big idea we started to hear was,
you don't have to have a traditional program
with Sunday school classes divided up by age.
In fact, a lot of families don't even want that any more.

What you *can* do is, first, take a look at what you're already doing,
and ask, how could this stuff we're already doing
be more inclusive of families with kids?
And, what are we already doing
that's *already* inclusive of families with kids?

Like for example,
did you know one of our small group ministry groups
already has a few parents in it? They meet online, at night,
so people can participate after work, no childcare needed.

So what's happening now is,
Wendy Wyckoff has put together a Family Ministry Task Force
to spend a few months trying out some experiments
so we can learn *what's going to work for families*
that *we* can offer *now*.
If this sounds exciting to you, it's not too late to join.
We're actually meeting this afternoon at 12:30 p.m.
in the Gallery *[point to it]*,
and you're welcome to come check it out!

And now, I want to remind people of what we already know
about experiments:
Some experiments may work, some may not.
It may feel a little bumpy as we try new things out.

Especially ways of doing things that don't feel familiar,
maybe even don't feel like the "right" ways to do something.

So what does this fellowship need from you
in this time of trying things out and learning?
Your patience.
Your support.
Your blessing.
And may we all be blessed
by this season of new life,
new springs flowing in our hearts,
sacred water of a new life
that we have never yet drunk.

May it be so.

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[1] Antonio Machado, "Last Night as I Lay Sleeping," trans. Robert Bly.

Water Communion/Blessing of the Waters

And now, you are invited to participate
in our Water Communion, a beloved ritual
of UU congregations around the country
symbolizing the community we create together
and the continuity of past, present, and future.

In a few moments,
those of us here in the sanctuary
will be invited to pour a bit of water into a common bowl.
Some of us have brought water from someplace special to us.
But if you didn't, don't worry!
We have plenty of water for you to use.
Everyone is welcome.

And if you're here online,

your invitation will be to take your bit of water
and pour it into a bowl wherever you are right now,
knowing that many others are doing the same thing
in many different places.

We'll invite everyone to pour your water in silence
as our choir sings.
And then, after the service,
you're invited to share your stories
of where your water came from and what it means to you.

We begin by pouring water from water communions past
into the common bowl. *(Pour water)*

Now, with reverence, I invite you to join in the Water Communion.
If you are online,
pour your water into your own bowl whenever feels right.
And if you're here in the sanctuary,
the worship associates will go row by row
and invite you to come forward when it's your turn.
May the waters be brought forth.

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We add this water to symbolize the waters
added by the members of our Zoom congregation.

Now we pause to let these gifts of water flow out
as a blessing to all who need it.

We bring forth three cups to receive this blessing:

First, for our country, and for our immigrant communities,
and for everyone who is resisting tyranny and fascism
around the world. May justice flow down like a mighty stream.

Second, for all people and all beings everywhere who are suffering.

And third, for our earth which urgently deserves our care.

Our water ceremony is now complete.
But may the gratitude, love, and service it inspires
flow on and on.
May it be so.

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Extinguishing the Chalice/Closing Blessing

In just a moment, I'll offer a closing blessing,
then Susan/Carolyn will extinguish our chalice
until we light our flame again.
After that, you're welcome to stay for hospitality!
I'll be around to chat, and I'm hoping to connect with folks on Zoom
via a laptop we'll set up outside.

And now, we extinguish the chalice,
but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community,
or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we meet again.
Blessed be and amen.