

Water Justice

Congregational Resources for Worship and Study



Michigan Unitarian Universalist

Social Justice Network

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Introduction/Purpose

Many Unitarian Universalist Churches hold a Water Service/Communion once a year, often in late summer or early fall.

Often Water Services include a time for congregants to bring in water and share it in a communal vessel. Often people are invited to share where the water comes from, as many have traveled over the summer. Some congregations take the shared water outside to water plants or a special tree. Other congregations sterilize the water and use it throughout the year for dedications and memorial services.

The UU Water Ritual was initiated by Carolyn McDade and Lucille Longview at the Women & Religion Continental Convocation of UU's in East Lansing MI in 1980. The original intention is clear in this quote from that service: "Celebrating now our connectedness, we choose water as our symbol of empowerment".

This year, as you plan your service, remember that people in Flint are still living with poisoned water, and there are currently tens of thousands of people in Detroit with no access to water due to lack of ability to pay. Certainly many of these families, as well as others living in poverty will not have the opportunity to travel to exotic places or even Michigan beaches to collect water.

The Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network is asking our congregations to approach your water service/communion from a perspective of justice- a celebration of our connectedness and a symbol of our empowerment. Let us remind our congregations, not only that "Water is Life", but that many (in our own state) are living without it. Let us be reminded of the privilege most Unitarian Universalists have, that gives us the opportunity to not only travel, but to be able to afford our water bills, or even to move out of necessity. Let us also be reminded how precious our great lakes are, and our drinking water. From an environmental perspective, we also need to be doing much more to ensure we continue to have access to clean drinking water, and to stop the corporate pollution and control of our water!

Below are some resources we have collected to help you begin to plan your service, or to add to a service you've already begun to plan! Resources can be adapted to fit your needs. Please give credit to the authors.

Many of you are likely already planning on incorporating justice and empowerment into your water service, and some of you have been doing it for years. If this is the case, and you have resources to share or sermons we could post on our website. Please send them to us!

If you choose to include water justice as part of the theme for the service, please let us know. We'd like to share that information with others around the state fighting for water justice. The Peoples Water Board and activists in Flint recognize and appreciate the work done by Unitarian Universalists, let's continue to let them know we are in this together!

Important Info for Individual or Group Study

Michigan Water Legislation

See attachment

National Water Legislation-

The Water Affordability, Transparency, Equity and Reliability (WATER) Act

https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/sites/default/files/fs_1704_water_jobs-web.pdf

Encourage your member of Congress to support the WATER Act:

<https://secure.foodandwaterwatch.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=2938>

“The Impact of Geographical Water Shutoffs on the Diagnosis of Potentially Water-associated Illness, with the Role of Social Vulnerability Examined”

http://wethepeopleofdetroit.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/WaterShutoffs_IllnessesReport2017.pdf

Recent Public Health Study

Henry Ford Hospital, Global Health Initiatives, We the People of Detroit

Public Health Study Handout

http://wethepeopleofdetroit.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017_PublicHealthStudyHandout.pdf

We the People of Detroit- Mapping the Water Crisis

<http://wethepeopleofdetroit.com/communityresearch/water/>

Research on water bill pricing discrepancies, the effect of emergency management on the Detroit Water and Sewage Department, the impact of water shut offs on people’s health and foreclosure of houses due to water shut offs..

Detroit Minds Dying

<http://www.detroitmindsdying.org/>

This is a documentary-in-progress about access to affordable water in Detroit. In order to make documents and film clips available to the public before the completion of the film, the filmmaker created this website.

UUSC- Water Justice

<http://www.uusc.org/?s=water&submit>

Articles related to the work and research the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee has done related to access to clean and affordable water.

UUSC Covenant Group Gatherings- The Right to Water

http://www.uusc.org/sites/default/files/covgrp_envjus.pdf

Through the Covenant Group model of intimacy and ultimacy, members will be inspired to take action on human rights issues that affect our global community.

US Water Alliance- An Equitable Water Future, A National Briefing Paper

<http://kresge.org/sites/default/files/library/equitable-water-future-us-water-alliance.pdf>

This report presents a water equity framework, drawing on the wisdom and innovation of hundreds of leaders from across the public, nonprofit, and private sectors. It spotlights promising strategies for ensuring that all people have access to safe, clean, affordable water, benefit from water infrastructure investment, and are resilient in the face of a changing climate.

Worship Resources

Children's Water Communion

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/toolbox/session9/109712.shtml>

This is an enactment of a traditional UU Water Service, it is part of the Tapestry of Faith Children's Curriculum. I have included it as a resource in case you are unfamiliar with a typical UU Water Communion Service.

Dry Water Ceremony

(August 26, 2012, Mary Lou Malone)

Leader: Welcome to the 1st UU Water Ceremony, 2012. Traditionally this is the time when we share our summer vacations or lack thereof. We first had a water ceremony on the Sunday after Labor Day, traditionally a day of homecoming and beginning the new church year. We did that for several years; then we moved the ceremony to Labor Day weekend, another traditional end of summer date. In the meantime the Worship Committee has been working to produce quality worship services 52 weeks a year with seamless from spring to summer and summer to fall. This year with Reverend Mohr preaching year-round, we have come as close to our goal as I can remember. So on the day we are singing camp songs with a make-believe fire we are going to have a dry water ceremony. Let us begin with a moment of silence as we remember the victims of this summer's drought.

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Outside U.S.: If you have traveled outside the United States recently, please stand. Whether you are remembering romantic tropical sunsets, cruising the Greek Islands, or crossing the border to Canada, you have experienced international waters. Remember the beauty, but don't forget the distress of these waters from over-fishing, from oil spills and other dumping. Let us observe a moment of silence.

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Outside Michigan: If you have traveled outside Michigan in the United States, please stand. Remember the white water of the Penobscot in Maine, the Nantahala in North Carolina, the mighty Mississippi, and all the other lakes, streams, and rivers you may have crossed or come near. Also remember the rivers that run dry before they reach the ocean, the damage caused by dams and mountain-top removal mining. A moment of silence please.

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Outside Detroit: If you traveled in Michigan outside the Detroit metropolitan area, please stand. Did you go to Lake Michigan, Lake Superior, Lake Huron, Lake Erie, Grand Traverse Bay, Tahquamenon Falls, Mackinac Island, Saginaw Bay, Torch Lake, Walloon Lake, Houghton Lake, Otsego Lake, Interlochen, Blue Lake, the Au Sable River, Raisin River, or any of the many other lakes and rivers in our watery state? Remember also the Kalamazoo River still recovering from the Enbridge oil spill. Remember the water we have underground, the Mecosta aquifer being depleted to supply a demand for bottled water. Remember the underground water being contaminated by fracking. A moment of silence please.

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Detroit: Please stand, if you came downtown for the fireworks, the boat races, the Grand Prix, or plan to attend the Jazz Festival; if you took a walk on the Riverwalk, visited Belle Isle for a picnic or a ride around the island, took a boat ride or watched the river out your window, or took a drink of cold, clear water straight from the tap. Remember that all of this water is ours, held in common. It is managed and protected as a public service. Water is a human right. A moment of silence, please.

. . . .

Leader: The final words are from “Human Estuaries” by Jourdan Keith.

“You are a body of water. If you knew this, would you protect yourself? The water in your body is part of the water cycle and connected to every other body of water. If you knew this, would you want to protect all the bodies of water on the planet?”

Blessed be.

Water Justice Taizé Ritual –

This Taizé water ritual is an opportunity to witness the power of water in our lives.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/0B6OVjcokw9hmfmg3LW11MFIXaFRLZDRsekdvT25TTWZaNXlzUktpdF9RenlxZXQ2S1lieIU>

Readings

Excerpts from “Living Water” by Rev. Marilyn Sewell

“Every ancient culture revered water. In Sumerian, the word “mar” meant sea, but that was also the word for womb;

“A” was the word for water and it also meant sperm, contraception, generation.

The Hebraic language includes the concept of Mem, deciphered as mother, life, womb or sea.

“Everything was water” say Hindu texts, and in Tantric manuscripts, water is “prana”, the vital breath which brings life.”

“Life originally emerged from water, and water nourishes all living things... Water is life, and therefore is the sacred birthright of every living creature.”

Adapted from “Water, Water,” by Rev. Myke Johnson

Each time we drink water,	let us be thankful.
Each time we wash with water,	let us be thankful.
Each time we feel the rain,	let us be thankful.
Each time we swim in water,	let us be thankful.
Each time we gaze at the beauty of water,	let us be thankful.
Each time we take action on behalf of water,	let us be thankful.
So may it be. Amen.	

From: Singing the Living Tradition hymnal

#526, Inuit Shaman Uvavnuk

#528, Langston Hughes

#529, Rabindranath Tagore

#554, Thich Nhat Hanh

When to Speak, When to Keep Silence, by Mark Belletini

Leader: When the machete of injustice

Tear apart the fabric of the nation and the world

Congregation: I speak up.

Leader: When the sunset resembles purple and orange vines

Entwined like lovers,

Congregation: I sigh in silence.

Leader: When the mud of deceptions and trickery

Smear the mirror of public life,

Congregation: I speak up.

Leader: When the moon rests like a thing slice of lemon

In the sparkling glass of morning,

Congregation: I smile in silence.

Leader: When the insecure bully me,

Or the greedy clutch at the common purse.

Congregation: I speak up.

Leader: When a song lifts my soul aloft like a lark,

Congregation: I swoon in silence.

Leader: When war and rumors of war destroy

Congregation: The hopes and lives of children,

I speak up.

Leader: When I am overcome by the sheer reality

Of a communion of life

Connecting every woman, man and child

On this one world earth,

Congregation: I give thanks in silence.

Leader: When I am restrained by systems of control,

Manipulation, denial and duplicity,

Congregation: I speak up.

Leader: When words cease, the breath moves deep and slow,

And the inner and the outer are as one for a time,

Congregation: I wonder in deep, deep silence.

Hymns

From: Singing the Living Tradition Hymnal

#4, "I Brought My Spirit to the Sea"

#24, "Far Rolling Voices"

#60, "In Time of Silver Rain"

#100, "I've Got Peace Like a River"

#108, "My Life Flows On in Endless Song"

#121, "We'll Build a Land"

#210, "Wade in the Water"

From: Singing the Journey Hymnal

#1007, "There's a River Flowin' In My Soul"

#1046, "Shall We Gather at the River"

#1064, "Blue Boat Home"

#1067, "Mother Earth, Beloved Garden"

Message for All Ages

Higgins: A Drop with a Dream

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/higgins>

A short and powerful story about what can happen when we come together.

The Water Princess

<https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-water-princess-susan-verde/1123459294?ean=9780399172588#productInfoTabs>

A young girl dreams of bringing clean drinking water to her African village.

It would be appropriate to read this story and make connections to the people in Flint and Detroit who are also in need of clean water.

The Day the Great Lakes Drained Away

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2180884.The_Day_the_Great_Lakes_Drained_Away

What would happen if there was no water left in the Great Lakes? What would we find on our lake floors? With global warming and the receding waters in our lakes and water rights and protection so important for us, this important book teaches children in a fun way to respect and protect our Great Lakes.

Water Is Life

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4WBbSv_N7U

Water serves as the central figure of this video produced jointly by the WWF and the World Youth Day 2013 to communicate compelling messages about the linkage between conservation of nature and religion. Water is one of the most planet's precious asset. It is critical to the survival of the all living things. Through stirring images of water in its purest state, the video reinforces the importance of preserving this limited resource; only 1% of all the water on the planet is drinkable and available on the surface.

Paper Water Drops

http://www.uupuertorico.org/Examples_eng/Water.htm

Use paper water drops instead of real water. Write messages on the water drops to be read during the service or displayed on a bulletin board following the service.

Testimony- Water as a Human Right

The following testimony was given in regards to the Water as a Human Rights Bill Package at the State Capitol, **June 3, 2014**.

Randy Block, MSW, Director

Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network

The Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network (MUUSJN) is grateful to Rep. Stephanie Chang for creating this opportunity for communities of people to have their voices heard on the need for safe, affordable water for all people in Michigan.

MUUSJN, a statewide network of over 2,000 Unitarian Universalist activists in 27 congregations and their allies, continues to work as a partner with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) to respond to the water affordability crisis for low-income people in Detroit. While people in the southwest U.S. are experiencing a water crisis that is a result of a severe drought, Detroit's water crisis is not a shortage of water. It is due to an unfair rate structure that makes water unaffordable to low-income people. As a statewide network, people in UU congregations in the Upper Peninsula, in Muskegon, and Flint, also experience deep concern about access to clean, affordable water. Our Network pledges to continue to work to make water a human right, not only for the people of Detroit but also for all Michigan residents.

Water, the lifeblood of the planet, should be held by governments as a public trust. For the United Nations, access to clean potable water is counted as a human right. 2013 Census estimates indicate that 92.2% of Detroit residents are people of color and over 39% of Detroit residents live below the poverty level. The largest basin of fresh water in the world flows by Detroit through the Detroit River. Yet, as **of July 2014**, as many as 150,000 homes were threatened with water shut-offs for non-payment by decree of an "emergency manager". Since **May 11, 2015**, thousands of new water shut off notices have been sent to Detroit residents. People, including children, the elderly and infirm, wake up every morning to find themselves unable to drink, cook, wash or flush toilets. Two thirds of these homes are occupied by children. People without water fear losing their children to protective services. People unable to pay their water and sewage bills fear losing their homes.

People of faith have had an important part to play in shining a light on this moral crisis. We must work to address this injustice. The UUSC has provided legal and strategic support to local water activists. MUUSJN will continue to work with the UUSC to provide information needed to inform and mobilize people of faith to participate in mass marches and demonstrations and to communicate with their elected officials about the need to adopt a water affordability plan. We look forward to working with legislators, with the People's Water Board, with the UUSC and with activists within our congregations to continue to educate and activate for water justice for all.

Water is a Human Right Testimony
Reverend Kimi Riegel
Northwest Unitarian Universalist Church

Thank you, Rep. Chang for hosting this very important hearing. Thank you one and all who have made the journey to speak truth to power. Thank you, legislators who have taken time to listen.

My name is Rev. Kimi Riegel. I serve the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Church of Southfield MI.

If you have ever needed a drink and not had one you know how miserable it is to be thirsty. If you have ever worn dirty clothes you know how essential it is to have water to bath and do laundry. To go without water is to suffer. To spend your days looking for a way to get water is to suffer.

Affordable water is a basic human right. Other basic rights depend on water. Without water there is no dignity, no health, and no life.

In 2005, Mikhail Gorbachev, said access to water is a fundamental human right. The former President of the Soviet Union understands. As the richest nation in the world the United States should be proud to supply that most basic necessity for life – clean accessible affordable water. One of the great religious teachers of all time said, “To the extent that you did it to one of these brothers (or sisters) of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.” Would we deny Him water if Jesus asked for it? Would we withhold water from a small child, an elderly person, a sick person? People who can’t pay their water bills are primarily single parents the elderly or sick. We do injury to the understanding of ourselves as good moral people when we create injustice. Water shutoffs create injustice. Water shutoffs do injury to ourselves.

I believe most humans wish to pull their own weight and do what is right. I tried to help someone pay her bill. She wants to pay her way. However, the proposed payment plan after the 10% I could offer was going to put her right back in shut off status in three months. If we make water affordable 2.5% of income or something comparable we acknowledge our human need to contribute to our own care. We give back health and dignity to our fellow humans. Those of who can carry a bit more should. We cut the taxes of corporations so they can make more money. Surely we can subsidize water bills to prevent a public health crisis.

In the end, for all of us, we are judged by the care we give to one another. We are judged by how we treat the least of these. Affordable water is Justice.

What Can A UU Do? Take Action!

Join the Peoples Water Board Coalition

<https://peopleswaterboard.org/members>

Donate funds to the Detroit Peoples Water Board Coalition

<https://peopleswaterboard.org/donate-to-peoples-water-board-coalition>

Donate bottled water and funds for water to We the People of Detroit for their Community Water Stations for people in need in Detroit and Highland Park

<http://wethepeopleofdetroit.com/give/>

Support the local and national legislation.

Contact your representatives in support of these bills. Share the legislation with others, organize to visit your representative together.

Encourage members of your congregation to join the MUUSJN Environmental Task Force.

Contact jennifer.a.teed@gmail.com if interested in more info.

Share and use these resources often!