

**Ingathering: Water Communion “In the Flow”**  
**September 12, 2010**

**Rev. Victoria Ingram**

Opening Words:

*Ingathering Prayer*

Eric M. Cherry

Guided by love, secured by hope, and made courageous by faith,  
we gather together at this moment of beginning:

Both learning and teaching, welcoming the injured and the healing,  
ever justice-seeking, we bless this church with our love.

With pilgrims and seekers, growing children and cherished seniors,  
guided by pillars and by leaders, we bless this church with our hope.

Praying and resolving, trusting and involving, some settled, some evolving, we  
bless this church with our faith.

Let us receive our Ingathering as a gift. May it inspire renewed commitment to  
our great covenant of love, hope, and faith.

Today, as we celebrate our community, we also remember people and  
communities who need our prayers: The victims of the September 11 attacks and their  
loved ones. Our Muslim brothers and sisters celebrating the end of the holy month of  
Ramadan. Those impacted by war, violence, or injustice anywhere. Our Jewish friends,  
celebrating Rosh Hashanah, and entering the Ten Days of Awe. Beloved earth and her  
creatures, struggling for survival.

May our eyes be opened to the many opportunities for broad ministry within,  
throughout, and beyond this place.

And may the blessings we come to know through our vision be a blessing to the  
world. Amen.

Reading:

*Rabindranath Tagore “The Stream of Life” #529*

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the  
world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless  
blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean cradle of birth and death, in ebb and  
in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my  
pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.

*Ralph Marston: “In the Flow”*

Enjoy doing nothing, and you can enjoy doing anything. Enjoy having nothing,  
and you can enjoy whatever you have.

Let go of it all, and you truly have it all. Let go of the need, and you experience  
the fulfillment. Be at peace with silence, and you'll hear clearly the song of your own  
purpose. Allow yourself to be confused, and you'll find yourself with new understanding.

Let the moment that is, unfold as it will. With no need to control, you'll have a  
positive, authentic and empowering influence. New possibilities flow toward you just as

quickly as you fulfill those you already have. Real value comes just as much as you give it. This is the now that you have. It is as beautiful as you know it can be.

### Closing Words

*All Rivers Run to the Sea*, Kayle Rice

It starts with a drop, then a trickle...a burble, a rush of water, bubbling toward its destination; and finally the wide, endless sea. All rivers run to the sea.

Today you brought water, poured it into a common bowl. Though our experiences have differed, these waters mingle, signifying our common humanity.

Today you came; and shared in this sacred community. May you depart this sacred space, hearts filled with hope for new beginnings; a fresh start.

Go forth, but return to this community, where rivers of tears may be shed, where dry souls are watered, where joy bubbles up, where your life cup overflows, where deep in your spirit you find this place a home.

All rivers run to the sea.

### **“In The Flow” - Remarks for Water Communion Sunday**

We are grateful for water, for the many ways we experience it, know it, and use it, enjoy it.

This summer has been hot and humid in Hamilton – think of a refreshingly cool drink after working or playing outside. Remember the velvety smoothness of water on your skin as you enjoy time in a lake or pool.

Perhaps you’ve found yourself in nature recently. Consider a rushing mountain stream, sparkling in the sunlight. Put yourself in front of thundering waves on a rocky beach, spray rising over your head and a thousand rainbows flashing through it. You watch birds drink and bathe in a garden fountain. Your eyes rest on the white sails of boats drifting across blue lakes.

Water surrounds us before our birth. While we enjoy life, it makes up some 60% of our body. When we die, loving hands will wash our bodies and prepare us for the next part of our journey. Water is symbolic and practical and necessary; it is refreshing and powerful and enigmatic.

This summer we have experienced thundershowers in Hamilton. Remember the feel of summer rain on your face – the good smell of water on parched earth.

Also this summer, there have been demonstrations of water’s powerful and destructive nature – floods and monsoons and earth so saturated with water that mud slides into the sea. Water, our constant companion and life-giving need, wears many faces.

And we are grateful for water, for the many ways we experience it, know it, and use it, enjoy it.  
(Adapted from Grace McGavran, "Water and Wave.")

This morning, we brought water from our various summer adventures – whether grand or simple, all of them were meaningful. We have joined these waters together in this common vessel. This annual ritual is our chance to remember again those summer moments and their impact on our lives. How will we allow summer's idylls to change us? What will we share with each other from how we have grown, what we have experienced, and how we understand life's lessons in this moment?

I'd like to invite you to turn to someone near you for a moment, and tell them about the water you brought today, where it came from and why it is significant for you. Please participate, even if you didn't bring water, by sharing something that you did this summer that was meaningful, joyful, or significant for you.

#### PAUSE FOR CONVERSATION

After we packed up and got our household loaded into the moving van, Carl and I drove from California to our new home here in Hamilton. Along the way, we saw a lot of nature and a lot of water – the Pacific Ocean, rivers like the Columbia, Mississippi and Grand, the Great Lakes, hundreds of creeks and streams and ponds. It was a long, and beautiful, drive.

What captured my imagination was seeing how these various bodies of water were interconnected - how creeks feed streams, which join rivers, that flow into lakes and form other rivers that flow to the sea. An interconnected web of life, if you will.

In this faith community, we, too, form an interconnected web. As we join in rituals like today's water communion, we remind ourselves of how we have chosen to come together to form this church community, to voluntarily make this a welcoming congregation, and to commit ourselves, one to another, in love, faith, and hope. Our journey of faith has led us to be a part of this denomination, not only because we intellectually can accept its Principles, but also because we want to share our lives and spiritual journey with others. We want to create a place where we belong, where we are loved in our wholeness and in our need, where we can engage with others in considering life's great mysteries and open ourselves to new insight, learning, and understanding.

Each of us brings our stream of life to mingle with the larger river of faith in this congregation. Have you ever been at the place where one body of water joins another? Each looks separate and distinct on their own, and where they join, for a few moments, you can see the melding of their waters. As they flow together, their waters mix, and together, they create something larger and more dynamic than they were alone.

As we join together and become one community, we retain our individuality, of course – we continue to be an individual drop of water, but we also become a part of

something larger. As our congregations join hearts and hands to form our larger Council and denomination, we again retain our unique individuality as congregations of practice, but we also become a part of a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Fairchild Creek has power, but the Grand River is more powerful still. So it is with our denomination.

One of our goals in community is to find our sense of flow with one another – to create a common vision toward which we can direct the current of our energy and effort. To learn ways of communicating and cooperating that support us in being respectful, inclusive, and effective in listening to and being heard by one another. To continue to build our ability to trust and rely on one another. It's a tall order for us human beings! And yet, our hearts and minds yearn for this level of commitment when we come together as a community of faith.

Water moves and finds it's own way – it flows in a natural channel, and often on a path of least resistance. But, when water encounters a barrier, rocks or mountains, water makes it's own way. With resiliency and persistence, water creates its own channel. Think of river canyons, carved by years of water's constant presence and movement. Think of the effect of glaciers in as they move, scraping out valleys and plateaus. Water succeeds in creating a changed landscape with steady effort and infinite patience.

Sometimes our Unitarian work for justice can seem challenging - the needs are so great, they seem like mountains; the forces of inertia so hard to overcome, they are like boulders and rocks. I despair that justice can ever prevail, and I think that my efforts, which seem so small in the face of all that needs to be done, might be in vain. Then, in those moments, I must remind myself of the lessons of water – persistence, resiliency, patience, constance. To influence change, to create an opening, I remember to keep trying, to keep speaking up, to keep up my courage and take the action that I can in the face of the obstacles I encounter. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “the arc of history bends toward justice.” I, too, yearn to see “justice flow down like waters and peace like an everflowing stream” as we sing in our UU hymn, “We'll Build a Land” in a reference taken from the Bible.

On our journey east, Carl and I saw places where rivers have been dammed up. Dams are those places where water's natural energy and flow gets blocked up. And it can happen in the life of a congregation, just like it does in the path of a river. Our energy gets stuck – maybe on a particularly challenging issue, or because of changes happening in the community. Perhaps its just because we've become bogged down in our ways of thinking and doing things. While dams block the wild and free flow of the river, they also do something else. Dams create a way to use energy in a new way – to transform one kind of energy into another. I hope we will learn to use the places where we get stuck as a congregation as an opportunity to create and encourage new ways of thinking, to transform and find new opportunities for action and new possibilities for using our energy within our community.

We come to our faith community this morning, bringing our individual streams to join together in creating a mighty river of joy, love, and faith. I am so delighted to bring

my stream to join with you as your Minister. We stand here together on the threshold of a new church year, of a future filled with opportunities and possibilities. We yearn to affirm our vision, to commit to a new beginning, to renew our covenant with one another, to live our mission vibrantly and visibly.

Being here in sacred space and time with each other reminds us of the faith home and the spiritual journey we share. We seek to find our flow, personally and collectively. We want to learn to persevere together, to be resilient together, to be patient with one another, and to overcome our obstacles together. How will we share our messages of faith, love, and hope with each other this year? How will we share it with all of those who yearn for a faith community like this one in their lives?

We are hopeful. We are filled with love. We have faith.

May our gathering together this morning be a blessing for one and all. May it inspire us to a year of continuing hope and expanding love and courageous faith. And may we walk this year, as always, in the full awareness of the blessed ties that bind us each to all.

(Final paragraph adapted from E. Cherry)

Blessed Be.