

**WELCOME TO THIS FRIENDLY CHURCH**  
**October 24, 20010**

**Our mission, as we live our historic, liberal faith, is to nurture spiritual growth, honor diversity, and offer service with love”**

**PRELUDE(s) Heather**

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**OPENING WORDS “The Simplest of Sacraments” # 725**

**Simply to be, and to let things be as they speak wordlessly from the mystery of what they are.**

**Simply to say a silent yes to the hillside flowers, to the trees we walk under.  
To pass from one person to another a morsel of bread, an answering yes,  
this is the simplest, the quietest, of sacraments. by Jacob Trapp**

**INTROIT Heather and the Choir**

**CHALICE LIGHTING**

**When the world is too much with us  
When uncertainty about our own and others' future worries us  
When troubles mount and press upon us  
When we are unhappy or distressed  
Kindle the small chalice within as a light to help banish the darkness  
When joy is ours because our world is beautiful  
When we are glad in the knowledge we have caring friends or family  
When our daily work, however humble, is a comfort and satisfaction  
When we feel ourselves blessed by the many gifts surrounding us  
Kindle the small chalice within as a celebration of light and love**

**And today, for these and all the reasons you have of your own, we  
kindle this shared chalice that it may shine for all of us and for our  
church.**

## COVENANT

*Love is the spirit of this church. These are our goals.  
To worship God in Freedom,  
To affirm the dignity of all people,  
To dwell together in peace,  
To serve one another,  
And to seek the truth in love.*

**HYMN**            Come, You Longing Thirsty Souls            # 209

**RESPONSIVE READING**    “Food for the Spirit”            # 726

**I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink,  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me,  
I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.  
Here is the bread of life, food for the spirit. Let all who hunger come and eat.  
Here is the fruit of the vine, pressed and poured out for us. Let all who  
thirst now come and drink.**

*We come to break bread. We come to drink of the fruit of the vine. We come  
to make peace.*

**May we never praise God with our mouths while denying in our hearts or  
by our acts the love that is our common speech.**

*I come to be restored in the love of God. I come to be made new as an  
instrument of that love.*

**I know that I am worthy. I know that I am welcome. All are worthy.  
All are welcome.**

**Come into the embrace and remembrance of this communion.**

**by Robert Eller-Isaacs, based on Matthew 25**

## CANDLES OF JOY and CONCERN

## OFFERING, OFFERTORY, and Sung Response

*From you I receive, to you I give  
Together we share, and from this we live.*

## **ANTHEM Heather and the Choir**

**SPOKEN and SILENT**

**PRAYER, MEDITATION, REFLECTION**

**Great Spirit, Spirit all about us in the natural world and in all who live in it with love for its beauty and the nurturing it brings, We are grateful for this miraculous day, for its clouds and the colors of its remaining leaves, for the trees and the grasses and the coolness of the air.**

**Though the colors are fading and falling, and in the words of the hymn “death stoops over the waters,” we find comfort, indeed inspiration, in the cycle of the seasons and its affirmation of life in nature, in all of life’s aspects, including our own.**

**For though we are reminded of the aging and the passing of individual lives, we are reminded also that, as in nature, and because we are ourselves a part of nature, death is never final, but instead a new birth into other bodies, into other expressions of life on-going.**

**In this world of the present moment, in our lives as we have come to live them in this human version of the ever changing unfolding of life and spirit, soul and substance, remind us of our connections to all that is and to those other lives, human, animal, natural, universal, within which we exist and interact.**

**Remind us of those close to us, whose lives have touched ours in innumerable and influential ways. Open our hearts to those who are sick and suffering, who are house-bound or in hospital or nursing home. Recall to us those who are away at school, who have moved to distant places but from whom our affections are not sundered, but who live on in our care, our concern and our love for them.**

**Remind us of those, our brothers and sisters, our relatives, both two-footed and four-footed, those whose roots are planted in the ground or who are winging their way through the air, swimming in our lakes and rivers – seas and oceans – those subsisting in refugee camps or prisons of all the**

kinds we have invented to isolate ourselves from those we fear, who are caught in the scourge of wars as military personnel, their parents, their families and friends. Remind us too of those who are imprisoned in other kinds of conflict such as bullying and domestic and child abuse.

Remind us, we pray, of all these things, both the wonderful and the wicked that make up our lives and present us, every hour of our days with choices as to whether we will stand aloof and aside or as companions in the sufferings and the struggles and the wild beauties of art and music and the spoken and written word.

Be, Great Spirit, in our hearts and in our hands. Be with us here, as we join together in silent reflection, meditation, and prayer ...

**SILENCE**

**Blessed be. Amen.**

**CHORAL RESPONSE**

**READING**                      Looking on the web for something about “communion,” I found a huge amount of material referenced about orthodox, evangelical and fundamentalist communions, but next to nothing about liberal religious communions. On the UUA’s website I found lots about Water Communions and Flower Communions, but nothing at all about our traditional UU understanding of or practice of communion. But I did find the following piece I’m using for a reading today:

**The particular mission field that the Rev. Ron Robinson has claimed is one of America’s abandoned places.**

**Turley, Oklahoma, a suburb of Tulsa, was a thriving place until the 1960s when white flight and the movement of oil industry jobs out of Tulsa began Turley’s long slide into economic and social decline.**

**Today many houses in Turley are vacant and abandoned, some boarded up, others open to the elements and slowly falling down. Burned-out structures are nearly hidden by tall weeds and brush. The once robust main street is now down to a gas station, grocery, a pizza place that won’t deliver, self-service laundry, car wash, and a collection of auto repair and salvage**

businesses. Most younger residents have no health insurance and little health care. Most children qualify for free school lunches. Residents live, on average, fourteen fewer years than people five miles south, in midtown Tulsa. Unemployment is twice the national average.

In the middle of this, Robinson, a Unitarian Universalist minister, has established A Third Place, a community center that includes Turley's only library, several computers for public use, a free health clinic, food pantry, drop-in living room, and a place to get used clothing and household items.

On Sundays Robinson draws three to ten people to an informal worship service that might include a capella hymns and readings from *Singing the Living Tradition*, brief Bible lessons, lessons from the life of Jesus, communion, and sometimes a video followed by a discussion.

But his ministry is not about Sunday morning worship. The numbers that Robinson tracks are not membership, attendance, and pledging. Instead, he's interested in the number of people who come through his health clinic, the number of community groups he is partnered with, and the number of community events the center can sponsor.

Robinson, who identifies himself as a Unitarian Universalist Christian, and who is executive director of the UU Christian Fellowship, a denominational organization of UU Christians, said that in Turley he presents "classic Universalist Christianity." He added, "It's definitely a liberation theology—the three 'R's: relocating to where people are struggling, redistribution of goods and justice, and reconciliation. We do the first two pretty well and we need to be a lot better at the third."

He said the Unitarian part of Unitarian Universalism "doesn't fit as well culturally with what we're trying to do because people here identify it more with wealth and education. Universalism gives us our best connection." He added that when people in Turley press him whether he is Christian, he says, "'Yes, but you don't have to be a Christian to be in our church.' Then if people have more questions, I talk about following Jesus and 'deeds, not creeds.' People get that. If they ask, 'Do you believe in heaven and hell?' I respond, 'I trust God's love is for all time. The details we don't know. You're free to believe in heaven and stay and work with us.'"

Few of our churches have any celebration of communion with bread and wine, which comes, I think, from the fact that many UUs came out of churches where communion was either not explained very well or where, theologically, the bread and the wine were believed to be transubstantiated, turned, symbolically, into the actual body and blood of Christ. I've heard people say that this smacked too much of cannibalism for them to be able to take part. This was a misunderstanding of what churches like the Catholic and Episcopalian taught was the mystery of the Eucharist, but it turned them off from taking part in a communion service and, because the majority of members in most of our churches are come-outers, they in effect blocked churches from offering communion in a gut reaction against what they believed it to represent.

But from the beginnings of Unitarianism in East Central Europe in the 1500s and Universalism in the 1600 and 1700s in England and the early American colonies, we have never understood communion to be anything but a memorial meal in honor of Jesus and his followers who celebrated Passover shortly before his death outside of Jerusalem. There has never been any suggestion of the bread and wine or grape juice being anything or turning into anything but bread and wine and grape juice.

Personally I'm comfortable with the old language of the communion service found in the old red hymnal, some of which was used in the communion service Marilyn Hammond served at West Sumner this past July. But I'm also comfortable, indeed in some ways prefer, a much broader interpretation that puts the emphasis on the root meaning of communion, which is “fellowship, mutual participation, a sharing,” which for me puts the emphasis on “community.” That's why in trying to find “communion” on the UUA's website I was intrigued to find the account of the church in Turley, Oklahoma, where they serve communion every Sunday and are located more in the community they serve than the small building they rent to be their church.

Their practice is more than just following Jesus' example by sharing a meal. They seem to me to be following his ministry in their daily lives, as Dorothy Day, Francis of Assisi, Gandhi, St Claire, and Martin Luther King did. In fact as all those who have the possibility of living a life of service in community with those they serve do, whatever religion or religious prophet

they base their ministries on.

While I'd hope UU churches would see the focus on – the reality of – Turley's immersion in the community in which it's located, see it as a powerful example of the community ministry of a whole church, it can't be more than an example. It can't be a model, except for other small groups led by individuals like Ron Robinson with the kind of organizational skills he has and a partner – a doctor – who can help subsidize his work.

If not a model, however, it's an example of the kinds of impact a small church group can have. It's also, although I wasn't even aware of the Turley church when I decided to schedule four communion services each year, it testifies to the kind of community feeling communion represents. My model was not in Oklahoma but Transylvania, where the communion services I attended in small Unitarian villages moved me profoundly. Ordinarily the churches in our villages there are not well attended except by older people. Sometimes that's because it's largely older people who remain in the villages, the young people having had to move to the cities to find work. But on the four Sundays a year the Transylvanian churches have communion services, they're thronged. I've been to churches where there was no more room for people to get into the church and they stood outside, the windows open even in the winter so the dozens of people, sometimes scores of people who had come back to the village from the cities where they lived so they could take communion, could hear the service and know when to make their way inside the church and forward to the table where the bread and the wine was served. As I said, I found those services profoundly moving, not just because of the loyalty and steadfastness of the old people who had withstood sometimes bitter persecution and made sometimes painful sacrifices to keep their churches going, but because of the meaning communion obviously had for the young people whose only connection with a Unitarian church was in going home to their villages on the Sundays communions were being observed.

Our churches in this country do not, nor do we ourselves, share the liberal but very Christian theology of the Transylvanians, nor have we endured the kinds of hardships that helped them create a shared identity as Unitarians and prompted their loyalty. But we have our own reasons for the feeling of community in our churches here and the loyalty a healing, and sometimes transforming faith, can give and we've found when we discovered Unitarian Universalism.

