

Water Ingathering

Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver
September 7, 2025

Wisdom Tale Script: The First UU Water Communion based on information compiled by Carolyn McDade, Rev. Dr. Susan Ritchie, and Marian Shatto as offered in the Soul Matters materials

A long time ago, in the 1970s, there was a kind and curious woman named Lucile Shuck Longview. She was a Unitarian Universalist and loved her UU church in Lexington, Massachusetts. In 1975, Lucile got to travel to Mexico City as a UU delegate to be part of the United Nations “Women’s Year” assembly. This was a huge meeting where people talked about women’s rights and how to make the world more fair.

When she came home, Lucile had learned something important: even in churches—even in her own beloved Unitarian Universalist faith—women’s voices weren’t always listened to. And that wasn’t fair.

So Lucile spoke up. She asked other UUs, “What if we looked closely at our faith and made sure it truly respected women, too?” Lots of people agreed. They worked together to create something called the “Women and Religion” resolution. It said: let’s take a deep look at the words and ideas we use in church, and make sure everyone is included, especially women and girls. The resolution was passed by the 1977 General Assembly, and for the next few years, people worked to change our faith traditions’ language to be more inclusive of women and to lift up and address the care of Mother Earth as a religious priority.

In 1980, as part of this work, Lucile and her friend Carolyn MacDade planned a very special gathering just for UU women. They called it “*Coming Home, Like Rivers to the Sea.*” It was held in Lansing, Michigan, where Rev. Kathryn first served - albeit two decades later.

At that gathering in 1980, the women held a beautiful worship service, “that spoke to our connectedness to one another, to the totality of life, and to our place on this planet.” They included a new, inclusive symbol of women’s spirituality: water, and in doing so, they made a brand new ritual: **The Water Communion.**

Each woman brought a little bit of water from somewhere special—maybe from a river near her home, or a place she had traveled, or even her kitchen sink. One by one, the women stood in a circle and poured their water into a big bowl. As they poured, they shared the stories of where their water came from and why it mattered to them.

The woman said that water was a powerful symbol—it could come from many different places, just like they did. But when they poured their water together, it became one. Just like them, many voices, but one strong community.

Some of the women even poured out their perfume bottles to carry the special water home, because they wanted to keep that feeling of strength and togetherness close to them.

That first Water Communion helped inspire big changes in the UU faith, like updating our UU Principles to use more welcoming language and to remind us to care for the Earth. And today, UU congregations all over the world celebrate Water Communion as a way to feel connected to each other, to our faith, and to the Earth. And so ends the story.

So now, as we get ready to hold our water ceremony, may we not only remember Lucile and Carolyn, but all of those who helped *us* find belonging by pushing our UU faith to be more fair, more loving, and more welcoming for everyone.

Welcome Back!© Rev. Kathryn A. Bert

Welcome back! I know you've not all been gone, but the start of the church year, the return to two services, the beginning of our program year, is always a big deal. This year, we have soft comfy chairs to sit on, if you're in the sanctuary. If you're online, you have better images and sound, we hope. And we're not alone, in celebrating this annual ingathering. I'd like to take five minutes to share a message from President, Sofia Betancourt, and some of our national leaders of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

[UUA Ingathering Video](#) – *This video will appear in an upcoming bulletin. In case the technology doesn't work this morning, I'd say this:*

I had hoped to show a video from the Unitarian Universalist Association for congregational ingathering services like ours. It begins with our president, the Rev. Dr. Sofía Bentancourt, but includes no fewer than 10 leaders from across our association, in under 5 minutes. Though we're not showing it this morning, please look for it in this week's bulletins. I was most struck by the words of Alex Kapiatan who is a community minister, educator, consultant, and anti-oppression activist. A trans and queer lifelong Unitarian Universalist, Alex has been working for almost two decades helping people expand their understandings, open their hearts, and practice solidarity across lines of gender, sexuality, race, class, dis/ability, age, and more, along with helping congregations engage in culture shift. Said Alex in this video,

"I believe one of our most pressing tasks as Unitarian Universalists is to claim religion loudly, boldly, unapologetically, in public, and join together with other liberal religions to tell a different story of faith from the one white Christian Nationalists are telling. They have spent decades twisting and perverting religion, poisoning people with a theology of scarcity and fear, all for the sake of building political power. It is essential for us not to cede religion to the far right."

The transcription on Alex Kapitan's words were a little off. Alex said "It is essential for us to not cede (give up or surrender) religion to the far right. The closed captioning said "feed religion to the far right," (as in give food to) which doesn't make much sense. Alex' point, however, that "one of our most pressing tasks as Unitarian Universalists is to claim religion," is spot on.

To that end, we as a congregation have been working on a vision statement to accompany our mission. Now, generally, the vision comes first and then the mission, but for whatever reason, we had a mission statement and a covenant but no articulated vision. This was something our consultant Rachel Maxwell pointed out when we brought her in to – frankly – look at our finances, but she noticed the lack of vision and suggested that articulating our vision would help us – to use the metaphor of the day – row the boat in the same direction. *This boat is steady and sure and will carry us to the farthest shore.*

The vision describes the world we seek: *why* we do the work. The mission breaks down what this congregation does to work toward that vision: the *how*. The covenant reminds us of the promises we make to one another as we engage in that work: *how* we do the *how*

The promises you made this morning are a part of that covenant we have with one another. The covenant members promise when they join the church, adopted in 2017, begins: *As members of UUCV, we commit our best efforts to inspiring and supporting each other in our quest for truth, meaning, and compassionate community.* And then lists things we do like *practicing acceptance, nurturing healthy relationships*, etc. But in addition to those general promises, we each make specific ones to this community. I promise *to speak the truth in love*, a line I spoke when you installed me as your minister, for example. We adopted a congregational covenant, but our staff has a specific covenant with one another, as does our Board and other leadership bodies. We've grown in an understanding of the importance of the promises we make to one another in community.

Likewise, we have a mission: *to come together to deepen spiritual experience, grow beloved community and act on our values in the wider world.* We updated the mission in 2024.

But to my knowledge, this congregation has not ever had a vision statement. Sure, we have visions of what we're about and how we want to change the world, but we've not had the conversation with one another to see if our visions are even the same. That is the work we've been doing this summer. And so I'd like to share another video, this one produced by our vision team, to talk about this work. Before I share it, however, I do need to point out that it is already outdated. We tried to show it two weeks ago before worship, but because I didn't sound the singing bowl first, I think people didn't notice it was happening, we had trouble with sound, and well, I don't think it worked. But I want to show it in its entirety today, even though the input period on the vision statement has ended.

[UUCV Vision Team Video](#) – *This video will appear in an upcoming bulletin.*

Like I said, we had hoped to show this video two weeks ago. The vision team met and considered the input you gave them and has come up with a third and final draft, the draft you'll be asked to vote on in our congregational meeting on September 21st. Look in this week's bulletin for a good article by Lynn Ungar about the reasoning behind these words. She explains how the vision team incorporated comments on the second draft about the lack of focus on the planet and the need for spirituality. I'd like to end this homily by sharing that Vision with you and then ask you to join us in singing *Blue Boat Home*:

"Together we cultivate a world that celebrates diversity and champions justice for all beings, grounded in the transforming power of love."