

Hello Friends of Africa!

Jill McAllister introduced me recently to you by email. I would like to help provide you with information about theology and church life in the UU context, as I understand it. I will be drawing from resources of my colleagues in the United States as well. I fear my knowledge of your African contexts is limited, so please forgive the mistakes I will make as I jump into this project. Not knowing all that Janice has shared with you before, I fear I may repeat some of her ideas.... I welcome your feedback, suggestions, and requests so that I can serve you better.

The Chalice in Worship

Not all UU churches light a chalice in worship, but most do. We do it many different ways. I've been serving the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lansing as their minister for five years now, and we've done it several different ways since I arrived. I change the ritual on a yearly basis. Here are some of the ways we've done it in East Lansing, Michigan, USA:

1. **Children:** I ask children to light the chalice. The younger children have the help of their parents, of course, to avoid fiery accidents. This is an opportunity to introduce children to the rest of the congregation. This is important because our youth and children leave partway into the worship service to attend religious education classes, so adults don't see them or get to know them as well as they might if we worshipped together for an hour each week. The children would say their names and identify their age and other members of their family when they light the chalice. I think it also honors the children.
2. **Unison words:** I have also lit the chalice myself (as worship leader) and led the congregation in words we say together. I think it is powerful when a congregation speaks with one voice. I would have the words printed in the order of service (which I'm guessing that you may not all have or need printed orders of service?!) These words would change weekly, and here are two samples.

Christine Robinson #448 in *Singing the Living Tradition*:

We gather this hour as people of faith with joys and sorrows, gifts and needs. We light this beacon of hope, sign of our quest for truth and meaning, in celebration of the life we share together.

Marjorie Montgomery #452 in *Singing the Living Tradition*

Life is a gift for which we are grateful. We gather in community to celebrate the glories and mysteries of this great gift.

3. **Lay Leader Same Words:** For the last several years, I have asked the lay leader who welcomes people to the church service, to say the chalice lighting words. One year, all year, they said these words by Annie Dillard

(#420 *Singing the Living Tradition*) *We are here to abet creation and witness to it, to notice each other's beautiful face and complex nature so that creation need not play to an empty house.*

I enjoyed hearing different lay leaders say the same words each week – I heard different things in those words with the different voices.

4. **Lay Leader Different Words:** This year, each lay leader who does “the welcome” is choosing their own words. Each time Cindy in the congregation, for example, lights the chalice, she has decided to say the end of this poem by Mary Oliver:

*...What is the name
of the deep breath I would take
over and over
for all of us? Call it*

*whatever you want, it is
happiness, it is another one
of the ways to enter
fire.*

Dan in the congregation, however, lights the chalice each time with these words by Kathleen McTigue (#706 *Singing the Living Tradition*) *Let us seek to remember the wholeness of our lives, the weaving of light and shadow in this great and astonishing dance in which we move.*

5. **Chalice Lighting Round:** Finally, I want to share how we light the chalice this year in worship. First, a board member or lay leader welcomes everyone to church. Then, this person asks the congregation to greet those seated next to them. You may recognize this tradition as “passing the peace” where we shake hands and say hello to our neighbors. Then, the worship leader begins singing a round that the congregation knows. The song is a cue to end their greeting and begin singing. When the singing ends, the lay leader says the chalice lighting words they have chosen and the worship leader lights the chalice. One of the songs we sing in a round is #188 from *Singing the Living Tradition*. The words, adapted by Sufi mystic poet, Rumi, are: *Come, come whoever you are, wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving. Ours is no caravan of despair. Come, yet again come.*

Questions have arisen for me as I've prepared this for you. **1.)** Do you have orders of service that congregants follow during worship? (it is very common in North America, but perhaps not for you...) **2.)** Do your congregations have a copy of *Singing the Living Tradition* in English? **3.)** Are there copies of that resource in French or the native languages of your congregations?