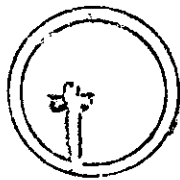


CEREMONIES  
for  
SPECIAL SERVICES

In  
Universalist Churches



## Introduction

These pages are offered to the ministers at the Rochester General Assembly of the Universalist Church of America to help fill in a gap in the important field of ceremony or ritual. Little material is available in published form that liberals can use to enrich the special services of the church and there seems to be a growing awareness of the need for better services for the reception of Church members, dedication of children, weddings, etc.

These services are offered not as an answer to the need but as a step toward filling the need. They are suggestive and tentative, and are presented in the hope that those who are interested will criticize them, offer suggestions for improvement and perhaps create further services. Especially, it is hoped that other ministers who have already created new forms will share them, for undoubtedly there is much good material which is not generally known.

There has been a tendency in Protestantism generally to do away with ceremony and ritual and in its place to emphasize preaching and the study of the Bible. Informal and artistically barren services have been the result. This has been as true of the Universalist Church as of others. Often the only dignity and richness of our services has been dependent upon the personality and character and imagination of the worship leader. This is an uncertain basis upon which to build such an important function as church ceremonies.

At the present time, there is a notable renewal of emphasis upon worship and ritual. The last two or three decades have witnessed a return to pulpit robes, vested choirs and a more formal type of worship service, including occasionally even the use of liturgies. Churches have been remodelled to install chancels. The cross and candles have appeared in many churches where they were

unknown a generation ago, and there has been a renewed interest in symbolism.

These services have grown and developed out of experiences in the parish ministry, and with one exception have been used enough and with sufficient success to encourage this presentation. They have been used, revised, used and revised several times and by several different ministers who have been sharing in their development. They have drawn upon many sources, new and old, for materials. The confirmation service, for example, includes (with some revision) an historic service long in use at the All Souls Universalist Church in Brooklyn, New York, which is singularly beautiful.

These suggestions are offered to Universalist ministers in the hope that together we may develop more adequate ceremonies through which we may help our people to celebrate the great festivals of life and find their deepest religious interpretation.

The Humiliati

October, 1949

## Communion:

The first of the services suggested here is a new form of the communion service with a strong emphasis upon the commitment of the individual to religious living. Recognizing the sacrificial life and death of Jesus who committed his whole life to the fulfilling of his religious ideals, this service seeks to lead the worshipper to face the demands and challenges and problems of his own life with a similar commitment to live religiously.

The other services are largely built around the communion which is included with special application to the particular service. Thus the wedding service offers communion to the couple who are being married as a challenge to commit themselves without reservation to the fulfillment of their new relationship.

### Service of Communion

(Minister approaches Communion Table during hymn after the sermon)

Minister: Let the bread here broken be a token of the bodies of men which have been broken for us in sacrificial living.

People: We would present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.

Minister: Let the wine here outpoured be to us a token of the self-forgetting good which men must needs do for others if they are to share the fullness of religious living.

People: And let us offer ourselves not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

(The stewards will come forward at this time)

Communion Reading: Deep within us all there is a sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a divine center, a speaking voice to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives

warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto itself. Yielding to those persuasions, gladly committing ourselves in body and soul, utterly and completely to the light within, is the beginning of true life. It is a dynamic center, a creative life that presses to birth within us. It is a seed stirring to life if we do not choke it. It is the presence in the midst. Here is the slumbering God, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action. And it is within us all.

Minister: As Jesus supped with his disciples in an upper chamber, he took bread and brake it, likening it unto his body, saying, "This is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me."

People: This is my body which I give to be broken in the service of man.

Minister: And after the same manner, he took the cup when he had supped and likened it unto his blood shed for the common weal, saying "This do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."

People: This is my blood which is shed for all.

(Both elements will now be distributed, and the people are asked not to partake until all have been served. A period of meditation will follow, during which the worshippers may partake of the bread and wine, each when he is ready.)

Reception of Infants Into The Fellowship of  
The Church

Each one of us, when born into this world, came hither as a weak and helpless babe, utterly dependent upon the love and wisdom of those about us. Every child needs to be received by loving arms and to be guided with understanding care. Each has a just claim upon its parents and upon others who, as teachers and friends, are entrusted with its care, a claim to an intelligent understanding of its needs, and to all that is essential for the fullest development of its possibilities. Moreover, it has a right to acquaintanceship with its human heritage, and to knowledge of its duties and obligations to mankind. Hence, it becomes our privilege and responsibility to receive this child into the fellowship and care of the Church.

(To the parents)

By the receiving of Communion, you have acknowledged the sacredness of the life which has been entrusted to your especial care, and your solemn responsibility to so protect and encourage this child that it may realize the fullness of its promise. Do you at this time reaffirm that act of dedication?

(The parents will answer)

We do.

(The minister will address the congregation)

We, whose task as a fellowship is to strengthen and assist one another in every good thing, are called upon to pledge ourselves to be faithful and zealous in the care and nurture of this child. Let us then state our high purpose and resolution.

(The congregation will repeat in unison)

We accept this child into the fellowship of the Church Universal and we promise and engage that we will give him the guardian love and care of this church.

We covenant with

you that, so far as in us lies, we will strive to walk with you in the bonds of brotherly love and friendship. We will strive to assist you in all your endeavors toward a higher life. We will strive to aid you in resisting temptations. We will strive in sorrow, to comfort you with that comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God and, whatever may come to you, whether misfortune, affliction or sin, in the spirit of our faith which tells us that "Love never faileth", we promise never to close our hearts against you. May God seal our covenant, and keep us steadfast, immovable and abounding in the works of the Lord.

(To the parents)

Name this child.

(Parents)

N \_\_\_\_\_.

(Then shall the minister say)

N \_\_\_\_\_ with water, ancient symbol of purity, I anoint thee, receive thee into the fellowship of the Church Universal and dedicate thee to a religious life that thou mayest find peace and happiness and love.

(The Minister may use the following or offer prayer in his own words)

Thou life within our lives, through whose constant presence we are led through all our days, we bespeak for this new life which we have welcomed into our fellowship all the blessings of happiness and peace which we can bestow upon it. May we be confirmed in the covenant of fellowship that this new life may be guided wisely in the path of love. We are glad for its promise, and we pray that it may be led to reach the fulness thereof by abiding ever in Thy spirit. Amen.

God be with us as he was with our fathers, that his ways may be known unto our children, his saving health unto all peoples. Amen.

## Confirmation

Dearly beloved, the Church is a fellowship of men and women and children united by a common need of religious growth and companionship. We are not a company of saints perfect in faith and righteousness, but confessing our failures and shortcomings, we desire to be better than we are, and seek together the fullness of religious living. We strive to walk together in love and peace, to seek the truth, to strengthen and uphold one another.

Love is the doctrine of this Church;  
The quest of truth is its sacrament;  
And service is its prayer.

To dwell together in peace;  
To seek knowledge in freedom;  
To serve mankind in fellowship;  
To the end that all souls shall grow into  
harmony with the Divine.

Thus do we covenant with each other and with God.

As infants you were received into the fellowship of the Church when your parents or sponsors, who desired for you its care and nurture, assumed in your name its disciplines.

You have come now to confirm these commitments and obligations and declare your intent to share with us in the continuing study and practice of the religion of Universalism.

Inasmuch as this occasion involves a profound commitment to a new relationship, it is meet and right that opportunity be given for invoking the full power of your religious faith in a service of holy communion.

Do you promise that you will strive to walk with the church in the spirit of love, assuming your part in its worship and study with faithfulness?

(The candidates will answer)

I do.

Do you solemnly covenant and promise that so far as in you lies you will make love the doctrine of your life, and that you will make your life a continuing quest for the truth that it may be made manifest in your words and deeds.

(The candidates will answer)

I do.

(The congregation will then rise and say)

We covenant with you that, so far as in us lies, we will strive to walk with you in the bonds of brotherly love and friendship. We will strive to assist you in all your endeavors toward a higher life. We will strive to aid you in resisting temptations. We will strive, in sorrow, to comfort you with that comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God and, whatever may come to you, whether misfortune, affliction or sin, in the spirit of our faith which tells us that "Love never falleth", we promise never to close our hearts against you. May God seal our covenant and keep us steadfast, immovable and abounding in the works of the Lord.

(Then shall follow the service of holy communion)

(Then shall the minister place his hand upon the head of each one, saying)

N \_\_\_\_\_, you are now confirmed in membership in the Universalist Church. May the Divine Life within you guide you to the fullness of life, blessing you and all mankind. Amen.

(Then shall he say)

Let us pray.

Almighty and Everliving God, whose loving kindness never falleth, we praise thee for the dedication of these thy children. May the influence of thy spirit be as an insistent flame in their hearts, purging them of all low desire and directing them in the way of thy commandments.

May there be a confirmation in their hearts of every loyal purpose and a continuing renewal and strengthening of every holy desire. May they not be dismayed by any discouragements or temptations; and whenever weariness or sorrow overtakes them, may the remembrance of this sacred hour be to them an inspiration and a stay.

May we all be confirmed in our faith and love that we may run with patience the race thou hast set before us and be helpers one of another. Amen.

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When some are being received as adults having not been previously received into the Church, the following words shall be used in addition to or in place of the paragraphs beginning "As Infants..." and "You have come..."

You have presented yourselves as those who desire the care and nurture of this Church, declaring your intent to share with us in the continuing study and practice of the religion of Universalism, committing yourself to its disciplines.

## The Wedding Service

(The congregation seated.)

Dearly beloved (or friends), we are gathered here to witness the joining of this man and this woman in holy matrimony (or Marriage).

They have desired our presence on this momentous day of their lives as witnesses to the happiness which they have found together and to the pledge which they will not make, each to the other, for the mutual service of their common life.

We rejoice with them that out of all the world they have found each other, and that they will henceforth find the deeper meaning and richness of human life in sharing it with each other.

Taught by our own joys, by our own sorrows, even by our own failures, we remind them that in marriage as in all life, whosoever insists upon saving his lesser goods and his little self, shall miss what is greater, and whosoever forgets himself in devotion to his beloved and in consecration to their common enterprise, is surest to find a full and a happy life.

If anyone among you knows of any just cause why these two may not be lawfully joined together, let him speak now.

(To the couple)

I require and charge you both that if either of you knows any impediment to your being lawfully joined together you do now confess it.

(Then shall the minister say unto the man)

N \_\_\_\_\_, wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her so long as ye both shall love?

(Then shall the man answer)

I will.

(Then shall the minister say unto the woman)

M \_\_\_\_\_, wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love him, comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health, in sorrow and in joy, and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall love?

(Then shall the woman answer)

I will.

(Then shall the minister say)

Who has the honor of presenting this woman to be married to this man?

(The bride's father shall say)

I have.

(The bride's father will then be seated. Then the minister shall say)

Inasmuch as this occasion involves a profound commitment to a new relationship, it is meet and right that opportunity be given for invoking the full power of your religious faith in a service of holy communion.

(Then shall the minister go to the altar or communion table and shall then say)

Deep within us all there is a sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a divine center, a speaking voice to which continuously we may return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto itself. Yielding to those persuasions, gladly committing ourselves in body and soul, utterly and completely to the light within, is the beginning of true life.

When love beckons to you, follow him, though his ways are hard and steep. And when his wings enfold you, yield to him, though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you. And when he speaks to you, believe him, though his voice may shatter your dreams as the north

wind lays waste the garden. For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning. Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches that quiver in the sun, so shall he descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth. Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself. He threshes you to make you naked. He sifts you to free you from your husks. He grinds you to whiteness. He kneads you until you are pliant; and then he assigns you to his sacred fire that you may become sacred bread for God's sacred feast.

If you intend to lead a new life, following the high purpose which you have seen, draw near and accept this sacrament to your strengthening. Offer thyself unto God and give thyself wholly for him, so shall thine offering be acceptable. Whatsoever thou givest beside thyself I care nothing for, for I ask not thy gift, but thee.

(The minister shall then turn to the altar and the couple shall enter the sanctuary or approach the communion table as the arrangements may provide. Then shall the minister say)

Your approach to this altar (or table) symbolizes your desire to commit your life in complete dedication to the challenge which is before you. I now require and charge that you search the secret places of your hearts where no subterfuge nor evasion may stand, and if you do not enter into this service in wholeness of spirit, and without hidden obligation or reservation, that you do withdraw from this place.

(The minister shall then turn to the altar or be in an attitude of meditation and the couple kneeling or in prayer for a period of at least one minute.)

(The minister shall take the cup from the altar or table, elevated it, and address the man who shall repeat after the minister:

This is my life, given as a reasonable service to the fulfilling of my commitment.

(The cup is given as the minister says)

Drink ye all of it, and live.

(The minister shall then turn to the woman who shall repeat after him as he says)

This is my life, given as a reasonable service to the fulfilling of my commitment.

(The cup is given as the minister says)

Drink ye all of it, and live.

(After the partaking, the minister shall say)

Now may the blessed truth which thou has seen confirm and strengthen thee in all goodness, and bring thee to the fullness of life.

(The man and woman shall rise and join their right hands and repeat after the minister)

I, N \_\_\_\_\_, take thee, M \_\_\_\_\_, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish and thereto I pledge my faithfulness (plight thee my troth).

I, M \_\_\_\_\_, take thee, N \_\_\_\_\_, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish and thereto I pledge my faithfulness (plight thee my troth).

(Then shall the minister say)

What symbol do you offer for the fulfilling of these vows?

(The minister shall receive the ring from the man and say)

May this ring be now and ever continue to be a true symbol of the abiding love of him who gives it for her

who wears it.

(The man shall then place the ring upon the woman's finger, saying, after the minister)

With this ring, I thee wed, and pledge my faithful love.

(The minister shall then receive the ring from the woman and say)

May this ring be now and ever continue to be a true symbol of the abiding love of her who gives it for him who wears it.

(The woman shall then place the ring upon the man's finger and say, after the minister)

With this ring, I thee wed, and pledge my faithful love.

(Then shall the minister offer prayer in the following, or other, words)

Eternal God, we invoke thy tenderest blessing on all true lovers. We praise thee for the longing which draws the soul of man and maid together and bids them leave all the close bonds of the past to cleave to one another. We thank thee for the revealing power of love which divineth in the one beloved the mystic beauty and glory of humanity. We thank thee for the transfiguring power of love which ripens and ennobles our nature, calling forth the hidden stores of tenderness and strength, and overcoming the selfishness of youth by the passion of self-surrender.

We pray that their love may be made strong, holy and deathless, that no misunderstanding may fray the bond and no disenchantment of the years have the power to quench the heavenly light that now glows in them. May they early gain wisdom to discern the true values of life, and may no tyranny of fashion or glamor of cheaper joys steal from them the wholesome peace and inward satisfaction which only loyal love can give. May they look with sober eyes beyond these sweet days of fellowship to the generations yet to come, and to realize



that the love which they enjoy is a part of the sacred tissue of the body of humanity in which thou dost dwell, so that they may reverence themselves and each other, and drink the cup of joy with awe. Amen.

Love one another, but make not a bond of love:  
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.

Fill each other's cup; but drink not from one cup.  
Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.

Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone,

Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.

Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping;  
For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.

And stand together, yet not too near together:

For the pillars of the temple stand apart,

And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.

But let there be spaces in your togetherness,

And let the winds of the heavens dance between you.

Love one another, but make not a bond of love.

Those whom life and love have joined together, let no man put asunder.

Forasmuch as N \_\_\_\_\_ and M \_\_\_\_\_ have consented together in wedlock and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have engaged and pledged themselves to each other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving rings, I pronounce that they are husband and wife.

May all that is noble, lovely and true abide with you forever. Amen.