

## **Tradition and Change**

**Rev. Rita Capezzi**

**UUFM Bread Communion—11 21 21**

Writer and activist Alice Walker reminds us: “To acknowledge our ancestors means we are aware that we did not make ourselves.” We did not make ourselves, yet in the Fellowship, in this time set aside for giving thanks, we have made some bread, much bread, and shared it freely. Shared the bread and shared the stories of why the bread matters to us and how to make it. And we have not held back the secret ingredients. Bread Communion is a long-time practice of this Fellowship, part of its identity as well as a joyful celebration of community. It is a way to “link together the generations in this imperfect, but blessed community of memory and hope.” In 1952, Monroe Husbands of the American Unitarian Association may have ridden down to help plant a fellowship here in Mankato, but it is the traditions and the people that keep the Fellowship going. From the beginning and now, this is true. “We come to love a church, the traditions, the history, and especially the people associated with it. And through these people, young and old, known and unknown, we reach out—both backward into history and forward into the future.”

Beginnings are some sometimes difficult to pin down. Like all creation stories, ours is a bit shrouded in mystery. Our wayside pulpit, the wooden sign outside the physical Fellowship, states 1951 as our beginning, and our website follows suite. But typed recollections in an archive simply title “History” say sometime “in the fall of 1952, 20 people from the Mankato area attended a meeting at the Saulpaugh Hotel, addressed by Monroe Husbands, Director of the Fellowship Unit of the American Unitarian Association of Boston.” 1952 is when the AUA and now the UUA considers us to have become a gathered religious community. But the visit by Husbands “climaxed earlier meetings held in Mankato in the thirties and forties and addressed by the Rev. Georg J.M. Walen, Unitarian minister from Hanska, and the Rev. Grant A. Butler, minister at large of the A.U.A. The third meeting bore fruit, and the Unitarian Fellowship of Mankato was organized, holding its first public meeting on January 20, 1953, in the Northern States Power Company auditorium. [ . . . ] From its inception the Fellowship considered the Sunday school one of its most important activities.” Another document elaborates this concern: “The parents particularly wanted their children to learn to be aware and caring adults in a multicultural world.” These are our ancestors: determined, persistent, caring about their spiritual journeys and about making the world better. We do not make ourselves. Our affiliations here mean we share the spunk of these forbearers.

Since the early beginnings in 1952, growth in the Fellowship led to incorporation as a non-profit organization in 1961. This enabled us to purchase the house on Pohl Road as our first permanent meeting place. That structure was remodeled in 1979. The current Fellowship building was purchased in 2004 or 2005, and remodeled beginning in 2015. In January, we will begin a year-long celebration of our 70<sup>th</sup> year as a congregation. But the building is only part of the story, isn't it? As important and meaningful as it is, these last almost two years have taught us that we can remain one without gathering in person. It's not the best situation, but it is possible, because the Fellowship is much, much more than the building that has housed our gatherings.

We have learned this past year that we can remain in community with each other, a communion for each other. The very bread of life. Like the sun, bread gives life, and it is a symbol of life. And so, when it seems that color is washed from the world, because the real sun is sometimes hidden from us, we can make our own small suns. We share our light and lives, and by sharing all feel “themselves begin to shine.” We shine by sharing, we shine by giving of ourselves and to each other. Giving of ourselves is one of the acts that define our tradition as Unitarian Universalists, our community of the UUFM, and ourselves as followers of this faith tradition, members of this religious community. Giving makes us shine, giving helps all to shine.

How do we hold such traditions, like our Bread Communion, in a changed reality and as a multiplatform congregation? A congregation online and in-person and supportive financially but not much present in body. How do we stay connected and whole in this way and in these times? Well, one way is to use our imaginations. Just pause now, close your eyes, take yourself to a smell of bread—in your kitchen, in your grandparents or great grandparents kitchen, in a bakery, in a friend’s home, in the Fellowship. Catch that scent in your nostrils and allow it to linger on your tongue. See the shapes—round and firm, round and soft, rectangular with firm edges. See the knife that slices, the hands that tear. Hear the crunch of the crust, feel the crumbs. Anticipate the soft give or the firm bite against your tongue and your teeth. How delicious the experience, if only in memory. Memory keeps us connected to the goodness of the past and aids us in creating the future about which we dream.

Another way to keep us whole and connected in these times is through our stories of bread—meaningful individually and shared in community. Here now are eight brief stories of bread that matters—favorites, family traditions, multicultural, with recipes shared on our website, signs of the willingness of these folk and many of us to join in a community of giving and receiving. You can find the stories and the recipes on the Fellowship website. The link is in the Chat.

From Cheiron McMahill, Brazilian Cheese Bread, and Cheiron shares: “I learned to make Pão de Queijo from my Brazilian friends in Japan. It’s also gluten free.”

From Macey Forsyth, Snickerdoodle Zucchini Bread. Macey shares: “My favorite recipe is one I got from our Admin Melissa.”

From Tony Filipovitch, Basic Scone Recipe. And many of us know Tony is a scone expert. Tony shares: “This is a basic scone recipe that you can vary by the ‘extras’ you put into it. The trick is to work the dough as little as possible--just until it comes together enough to roll out.”

From Diane Dobitz, Poppy Seed Strudel. Diane shares: “This is a very traditional sweet bread from my German-Hungarian heritage. My mother baked this for us every year for Thanksgiving and Christmas. I learned to bake it from doing it with her. It isn’t as easy to purchase the poppy seed for the bread anymore. Believe it or not, until a few years ago it could be bought by the gallon in Dickinson, N.D., which is where I would buy it.”

From Sue Chambers, Orange Bread. Sue shares: This is “a family favorite that now makes an appearance at most family celebrations.”

From Nancy Cramblit, Butter Horns. Nancy shares: “This is the recipe my Mom always used to make her crescent rolls and her cinnamon rolls. Tommy and his cousin Jeffrey would always make a hole in the center of a crescent roll and squirt honey into the opening. I finally convinced my Mom to let me watch her make these rolls. She gave me several tips to making the dough which I include in the recipe.”

From Deb Fitzloff MoNKeY Bread. Deb shares: “This recipe was included in a first-grade class project and shared by my good friend who taught across the hall from my art room. We love it SO much that we cannot bake it unless there will be many people around to keep us from eating it up all by ourselves! Although I considered sharing my mom’s lefse recipe (and our kids and grands want to learn to make it someday), THIS is the recipe they routinely ask for!!!”

And from Ken Davey, Swedish Limpa Rye Bread. Ken’s wife Cathi Fouchi shares: “This recipe was given to Ken’s sister, Jeannette, when she was visiting their relative in southern Sweden in the mid 1970’s. The recipe is at least as old as the great, great, great grandparents generation. It was the typical bread used during meals to dip into the meat juice, dipping in the kettle. Ken liked the recipe so well, he has continued to make it for himself and family gatherings. His relatives are from Smoland near the town Lynnrud.”

Through the needs of our ancestors in the 1950s, this Fellowship was born. You can "Call It Dreaming," a dreaming brought to reality. This Fellowship continues because of traditions that we keep alive. And so, our Fellowship provides the space where we each, and all our disparate pieces, can fall into place, where we can break because our hearts are strong enough. It is a place where we see enough to follow, and we can hear when we are hollow. A place where we keep the light we're given and where the one thing we know for sure is that the time of these lives is all we have. And it is enough. We can make heaven on earth if we try. Our Fellowship is a place where we get a chance to say, for all the love you've left behind, I give you mine.” We give each other our love, fulfilling and enlarging the love that is greater than us all and all what has ever been known. We have been far from each other physically, for far too long. But although I am far away, thoughts of you warm my bones. I wear you all day. And we are on the way. We are nearly home. “An ocean and a rock is nothing to me.” Soon we will gather in old ways made new, recreating familiar traditions with creativity tempered by love.

In this Fellowship, we may not know or agree about what lies beyond this life, but it's our conviction as Unitarian Universalists that our actions—and our inactions—have consequences for the web of all existence. Our presence matters. How we relate to each other creates the conditions of hell or heaven here on earth. And the Fellowship is a place to create and to cultivate and to foster heaven, wholeness. Wholeness as we explore our individual understandings of the holy. Wholeness as we confront our personal and collective challenges. Wholeness as we unlearn biases and relearn compassion and inclusion. We struggle our way, together, to wholeness. And so, blessed is this ground on which I stand

this morning, on which I stand today for all of us, my small sun a substitute for the whole shining sun that we as a Fellowship are together. Holy is this place. Holy are the memories, this place which has formed us, this Fellowship where we store the icons of success and shattered dreams and gather threads and pieces of what we would become. Holy is this place of change and pain. "We are called to a love that is bold." "We are called to offer sanctuary, refuge, and comfort to everyone afflicted by the systems of oppression in this world." Holy is this place of dreams, for better relationship here among us and in the larger world, the places over the rainbow, where all children are wanted and all people are fed, where colors are the source of celebration and youth and age come to the table as one. "We are called to relationships of care and accountability." Holy is this place of connection, the place where we risk ourselves, and in awareness still, we change our lives. "It makes a difference in the quality of this world when people with access to privilege and power give voice to a vision of collective liberation and name the obstacles, within and without, that limit us." Holy is this place of becoming, where our lives and created and built worlds are all intertwined, and for this web of interrelationship we give joyful thanks. "May we remember and affirm that we are all in this together, friends. We are all in this together."

When we are asleep to the needs of the world and when we awaken to them and when we rise to meet them, we rise as one. And we rise together, aiding each other with the gifts we have. We are one religious community offering our gifts to the world. A world that needs all of our intelligence, all of our insight, all of our creativity, all of our appreciation and labor and stick-to-it-ivism. This is how we shall love one another with all our hearts, how we shall care for each other, with all our soul and our might. May you all know yourselves to be part of the UUFM tradition as it adapts and changes to meet the challenges of the now, as you also remember, today and every day, that you are loved, you are worthy, you are welcome, and you are needed. May you feel it so. May it be so. And may we say together, "Amen."

<https://uumankato.com/worship/uufm-rituals/bread-communion-2021/>