

illumination: A Celebration of the Chalice

A Unitarian Universalist Holiday

Established 1994 at The Unitarian Universalist Church of Little Rock

Background Information

illumination is a Unitarian Universalist holiday instituted by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Little Rock. Celebrated during the winter season, this observance places a distinctively UU festival on the calendar during a time of the year when many great religious traditions mark the change of seasons.

Since 1994 our church has celebrated illumination, a holiday conceived within one of our member families in response to their children's desire to celebrate not only the special days of other faiths, but a special day of their own. We have developed a weekend of programming including an illumination Feast, songs, and a Sunday service for all ages. Based on the enthusiastic response to our celebration both within our congregation and in our district, we seek to expand awareness of illumination at Unitarian Universalist congregations across the continent.

Preparations for illumination Weekend

Altar and Feast Decoration

On Saturday night, we have a potluck supper and ask everyone to bring special holiday dishes. We invite people to dress in purple and silver, the colors of illumination, and to wear chalice jewelry or clothing art (i.e., t-shirts).

We arrange the tables for the feast in a "U" shape. We cover each table with white paper, and decorate with greens donated from member's yards. As people arrive, they place their chalices on their table (these are lit during the ceremony before dinner while we sing "Rise up Oh Flame" in a round). We also place the chalice we use on Sunday morning on an altar at the front of the room.

For the worship service, we use bright purple fabric and silver toile for altar clothes. During the service, people bring their chalices forward and they are massed together on the altar. Traditionally, our congregation has a Christmas tree in the sanctuary; we have added silver and purple decorations to our collection of ornaments.

Guest at Your Table and UU Service Committee

It is our tradition to participate in the UU Service Committee's Guest at Your Table project during the weeks just prior to Thanksgiving through Christmas. We incorporate collection of the boxes into the worship service on Sunday. Boxes could also be placed on the tables during the Feast and a collection taken that night. Work with your local UUSC representative or contact UUSC directly to get the boxes and posters publicizing this program

Chalices and Chalice Design Pins

Children are provided with materials to make a chalice of their own. We use small terra cotta flower pots and saucers glued together to form the chalice. Acrylic craft paint is used to decorate with designs and colors of their own choosing (purple and silver are the "official" illumination colors, but we do not limit color choices). A coating of spray acrylic lacquer creates a lasting finish. Finish off with a votive candle.

Holiday Singing

We have included two illumination songs written by Ben Lovelace-Chandler. After the Feast on Saturday night we also have a holiday sing-along. There is a rich variety of songs that can fit into the illumination celebrations.

This Little Light of Mine has become an anthem of sorts for illumination. During the song, we "pass the flame" by touching fingers.

Publicity

Promote illumination with newsletter articles, pulpit announcements, and posters in a prominent location at your church. You might also explain the new holiday during children's worship or during intergenerational worship time. Preparation and explanation might also fit nicely into religious education lessons.

Useful Resources

- Readings, a story, and songs written and selected at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Little Rock.
- Tracy, Denise; [A Stream of Living Souls](#); Delphi Resources. Biographical sketches of Unitarians and Universalists.
- Unitarian Universalist Association; [Singing the Living Tradition](#); 1993. Rich source of hymns and readings.
- [Unitarian Universalism in the Home](#). Good history of the flaming chalice symbol, its designer Hans Deutsch, and his association with the UUSC.
- [The UU Kids Book](#). UU identity activities and craft ideas.
- "Seeing the Light", in [UU & me](#), a magazine for Unitarian Universalist Children, Church of the Larger Fellowship, December, 1997. Discussion of celebrations of light in the world's religious and secular traditions.

A Proclamation

illumination ~ Celebration of the Chalice

Whereas, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Little Rock represents a unique, liberal faith,

Whereas, the special days and moment of a people, the holy-days, provide the occasions for community,

Whereas, participation in the events of this community are critical to establishing a sense of spiritual and moral purpose,

Whereas, this denomination has been exemplary in teaching our children and adults the customs, beliefs, and cultures of other religions through acknowledgment of holy-days,

Whereas, we have an obligation to create our common future and to hand-on the future,

Whereas, we are a self-defining community, serving as cultural guides in our liberal faith,

Whereas, we have established principles which may be used to guide our celebrations,

Whereas, we have a beautiful symbol to light the celebration in the time of winter darkness,

BE IT DECLARED: That the Unitarian Universalist Church of Little Rock establishes the first Unitarian Universalist Holiday, illumination, A Celebration of the Chalice, to occur annually from Saturday evening to Sunday evening on the weekend preceding December 25, for the purpose of celebrating our unique past, present, and future.

Be it so declared on the eighteenth day of December, nineteen- hundred ninety-four.

Selected Readings

Opening Words

Here we have gathered in faith and fellowship. May the light of the solstice sun, the beam of the Christmas star, the glow of the season's candle and the beacon of our own chalice illuminate the darkness of our days and of our souls.

Closing Words

Our lives have been illuminated by our fellowship. Go now in peace with the knowledge that your light may offer a beacon in the darkness while our lights remain aglow to shine upon your path.

An illUmination Blessing

We have gathered this day in faith and fellowship to celebrate the chalice. May the light we have kindled illuminate our path so that we may seek always the truth; may the light we have shared ignite our passion so that we may seek always justice; may the light we have celebrated shine always each of our hearts so that we may offer a weary world hope and kindness and the promise of everlasting love. May the consecrating of this day and the blessings of this season bring to us and to our world strength, compassion and joy enough to illuminate our darkest nights and to fill our days with wonder. --Rev. JoEllen Willis

An illUmination Grace

I thank whatever gods may be
And the godliness in you and me
For this light-made food I take in
And use to shine my light again.

Thankful for the heightened gleam
I'll shine my light on widest beam
To cherish each and every hue
For the gold at rainbow's end is You.

Benediction

#704 in [Singing the Living Tradition](#))

Go out into the highways and byways.
Give the people something of your new vision.

You may possess a small light,
but uncover it, let it shine,
use it in order to bring more light and understanding
to the hearts and minds of men and women.

Give them not hell, but hope and courage;
preach the kindness and
everlasting love of God.

Lighting Our Corner of the Sky ~ A Story for illumination

Written by The Reverend JoEllen Willis

Ed, barely an angel, had arrived in the land above the land called sky.

It was winter in the land of sky, which meant it was dark most of the time. None of this blue sky stuff, not like in the movies. Ed was assigned the piece of the sky way over yonder. It was kinda out of the way, but it was his, and the Spirit whose voice was the wind assured Ed that in his corner of the sky, he could be who he was, say what he thought, and believe as he must.

So Ed set out on a winter's journey. Along the way, he passed through many other pieces of sky, each one as different as the clouds we see when we look up on a summer's day.

There wasn't much light to see these patches of sky, however, because, as I said, it was winter, and the sky remained dark for much of the day as well as the night. So Ed learned about his new neighbors not by what he saw, but by what he heard and what he understood. Being new to the sky, Ed had many questions, and his new neighbors told him stories of how things began, of what happened to you after your time in the sky was over, about why things happen, and who is in charge of the universe.

One of the first manors he passed through was the Old North. Here the people honored the earth below the sky, and in the face of winter's darkness, lit the Yule log for warmth and the glowing promise of another year. Here was the light of hope and faith.

He passed as well through the Promised Land where folks called themselves God's Chosen People. These were people with a passion for justice and a great belief in the power of their God to lead them onward. Here Ed learned the story of the miracle of the oil which burned for eight days when there was only oil for one. Ed saw candles flickering in memory of miracles and in remembrance of bravery against great odds. Here was the light of courage and of justice.

Crossing into New Bethlehem, Ed passed by a star beaming so bright in the night sky that it warmed his wing tips as he hovered behind it. The star hung above a small building, a stable, it looked like, except there were so many people lingering around it. He heard they were there to see a baby, a special baby who would change the world. So Ed learned that starlight and new life could brighten a winter's night. Here was the light of love and of peace.

Sitting in the darkness of his own sky, he remembered all he had learned: about hope and faith, courage and justice, love and peace. And he gazed over the horizon to see a soft glow. Not the sun, he knew. Ah, he remembered, in every part of the sky, the people had learned when the sun had retired for the season to kindle their own light and celebrate in their own way.

Ed sat on the horizon. He was lonely in the dark and the cold. But much as he had learned from his sky neighbors, he could not use their lights as his own. Yet he felt it, right there, in his own heart. It was a spark, a small light, perhaps, but his own light. He had, sheltered in his heart, the Spirit whose voice was the wind, whose shape is a flame which lives in hearts. Ed had a light to guide him and a flame to warm him, but how could he bring it out? He stared across the universe.

His eyes came to rest upon the sliver of a crescent moon. Standing on his tippy toes, flapping his wings ever so gently, Ed stretched, and leaned, and reached, reached out until...he grabbed hold of the moon and brought it into his corner of the sky. He turned it on its side to make a glowing bowl. No. Not quite right.

Wait! A small star lay just over--there. Ed snagged it, and placed it under the bowl and--voila!--yes--that was it--a chalice to hold his light.

Songs for illUUmInation

Rise Up O Flame (#362 in Singing the Living Tradition)

This Little Light of Mine (#118 in Singing the Living Tradition)

Sufi Chant and Circle Dance (*We do this together at the end of Saturday's Feast*)

May the light of the spirit surround you,
May the strength abide in you,
May the love illuminate your heart,
Now and forever more.

Come Join illUUmInation

Words: Ben Lovelace-Chandler, 1995, to the tune "Greensleeves"

Words

The season's here to celebrate
With joy and jubilation
A faith for all who want to share
Come hear this proclamation.

Chorus

Light, light the chalice flame
Let the glow our friendship frame
We have much to celebrate
Come join illUUmInation.

We work and worship, learn and play,
We constantly endeavor
To make the world a better place
For living in peace together. (chorus)

We honor Christmas, Channukah
and Kwanzaa celebrations
We cherish the dignity and worth
of people of all the nations. (chorus)

Come share this time, increase the joy
By your participation
We welcome you and all who come
To join illUUmInation. (chorus)

illUUmInation's Light

Words and music Ben Lovelace-Chandler, 1995, arrangement Sheriann Lovelace-Chandler

Words

In our circle, you will see
a chalice glow.
We are singing, holding hands
with friends we know. (chorus)

Chorus

Winter days are dark and cold,
so long the night.
We warm our hearts by basking in
illUUmInation's light!

Children's laughter you will hear,
of joy we'll speak.
We will promise to pursue
the truth we seek. (chorus)

Toward the summer now we go,
more light each day.
With our hearts in friendship joined,
we will find the way. (chorus)

When the spring dawns soft and warm,
a world of green
We will smile remembering,
illuUmInation's sheen! (chorus)