Honoring All the Mothers in Our Lives
and Flower Communion
(Version 2a)

A Sunday service led by the
Reverend Michael Walker, Interim Minister

Presented on Mother’s Day – May 8, 2016, at the
Unitarian Church of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
CALL TO WORSHIP (by Rev. Michael Walker)

With flowers and children on this springtime day,
We are reminded of mothers everywhere,
Our own and others, who sought for peace and harmony,
Who taught us right from wrong,
Who encouraged us on our way through life.
This morning, we light our flaming chalice
In honor of all the mothers in all of our lives.

May it ever be so and blessed be you all!

FLOWER COMMUNION

The roots of Mother’s Day are found in a proclamation by Julia Ward Howe, asking mothers to join together in the cause of peace. Also seeking peace in the days leading up to and during World War II, a Czechoslovakian Unitarian minister, Norbert Čapek, created what we now call the Flower Communion. It was a way of reminding everyone that we are all part of a community of caring, with an invitation to do our part to maintain harmony in our families, communities and lives.

So, it seems fitting that we have our own Flower Communion on Mother’s Day! Before we exchange these flowers, I wish to share the words of Norbert Čapek, who originated this tradition. This is his Flower Communion consecration:
Infinite Spirit of Life, we ask thy blessing on these, thy messengers of fellowship and love. May they remind us, amid diversities of knowledge and of gifts, to be one in desire and affection, and devotion to thy holy will.

May they also remind us of the value of comradeship, of doing and sharing alike. May we cherish friendship as one of thy most precious gifts. May we not let awareness of another’s talents discourage us, or sully our relationship, but may we realize that, whatever we can do, great or small, the efforts of all of us are needed to do thy work in this world.

*May it ever be so and blessed be you all!*

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In a moment, you will all invited to come forward and claim a flower, different than one you may have brought with you. If you did not know to bring a flower, that is all right, there is enough for everybody. And if you don’t feel you can walk up here right now, you can ask someone near you to pick out a flower for you.

We ask each of you, if you are willing, to come forward. As you do so, please come quietly and reverently – with a sense of how important it is for each of us to address our world and one another with gentleness, justice, and love. We ask that you select a flower – different from those you brought in – that attracts your interest. As you take your chosen flowers – noting their particular shapes and beauty – please remember to handle them carefully. It is a gift that
someone else is brought for you. It represents that person’s unique humanity, and therefore deserves your kindest touch. Let us share quietly in this Unitarian Universalist ritual of oneness and love.

[Flower Communion]

We each have in our hands a thing of beauty, a symbol of life and love, and of our connections to one another. *May it ever be so and blessed be you all!*  

**OFFERING**

This congregation offers a liberal spiritual home to seekers from all walks of life. We are proud of the work we do in the community, the classes we offer for children and adults, for the care and concern provided by this community and its staff, and for these two beautiful campuses that have each become a spiritual home for so many.

If you are here for the first time, we invite you to let the offering basket pass you by, because you are our honored guest. And if you have made this your spiritual home, we thank you for your continuing generosity.

Every month, we also collect donations during the Offering to support a worthy cause. This month, our Share-the-Plate Recipient is ________________.
If you are writing a check, please specify on the Memo line whether this is for your Pledge, an offering to UCH, or for the Share-the-Plate recipient.

Thank you, all, for your generosity. This morning’s offering will now be received.

Today is Mother’s Day, when we take time very year to honor, remember, and send out our love to all of the wonderful mothers, here and elsewhere, in our lives. Let’s start with a short bit of history: Mother’s Day in our country was first proposed by the Unitarian author and activist, Julia Ward Howe. You may know her as the person who wrote “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”, an abolitionist and suffragette, and a literary figure. Her famous Mother’s Day Proclamation was a Call to Peace, rather than a Call to Arms, encouraging the mothers of the world to band together and protest wars and the loss
of the lives of their soldier-sons.

That seems so apropos. Across all time and many species, mothers have protected their families from all manner of toils and snares. The first relationship each of us ever had was to influence us in how we would approach all other relationships that came after. There is much to be learned from that. For many of us, it is an opportunity to remember someone who selflessly spent a couple of decades, at least, taking care of us. For some of us, it is a bittersweet day as we remember mothers who are gone. And for others, it is a less pleasant day, because relationships with their mothers were fraught with difficulties. And finally, some of us look forward to celebrating on this day people who may not have been our biological mothers, but who played the role of mother-figure in our lives. Someone in your past was a nurturer, someone was an advisor, someone was a person who cared, when it seemed that no one else did. I’ve always loved these words by Erma Bombeck:

*When your mother asks, 'Do you want a piece of advice?' it is a mere formality. It doesn't matter if you answer yes or no. You're going to get it anyway.*

Who is a mother? There are some in our society who strongly profess their belief in the sanctity of the nuclear family. The stereotype is a firm father, a soft mother, and 2.5 kids. So few of our families actually look like that.

In my own family, for example, I have a mother and two fathers. I also have four siblings, one deceased,
two in lesbian relationships, one is straight and unmarried (with no plans to change her status), and myself with my gay partner. Also, two of my sisters grew up in a different country on the other side of the world: Spain. Neither I, nor any of my siblings, have had children. Quite plainly, we are not a nuclear family. But it is also true to say, and very important to me, that regardless of the type of family we have developed over the years, my mother and I have always been very close.

I ask again, who is a mother? We have many young parents in our congregation, with kids that know each other from our RE program. Other mothers here are at a point in their lives when their children have grown up and gone off to live their own separate lives.

Who is a mother? There are children in our congregation who don’t see their mothers every day, due to a number of reasons. Some don’t have biological mothers in their lives at all. There are some who have two fathers, there are also some who have two mothers. There are some whose mother-figure is not even a woman. And there are some children in our congregation, who have multiple people in their lives that they look to as they would a mother. Some are blessed with much and others are challenged by having less.

While I realize that some people have had difficult relationships with their mothers, I hope that most people find within them gratitude for their own lives, brought forth by their parents. To find gratitude for life’s lessons, even the hard or difficult lessons, taught to one by our families, and especially as taught to one at mother’s knee.
I am reminded of the words of Pearl S. Buck, who once wittily declared, “Some mothers are kissing mothers and some are scolding mothers, but it is love just the same, and most mothers kiss and scold together.”

I started this sermon by saying that our first relationship in life was to influence us in the conduct of all relationships that come after, from early childhood through retirement. We learn about life’s challenges, and mechanisms for coping with them. We received advice from mom, whether we wanted it or not. We learned how to be in a family, how to be in a community, how to treat other people, and how to expect to be treated, too. We learned what a relationship with another person was like, and maybe we learned the pitfalls to avoid. For most people, mother taught us how to care and be cared for, in the give-and-take that is relationship, that is life.

Most of us learned the rules that mom laid down for us: Don’t hurt someone, don’t take their toys, don’t touch inappropriately, don’t fib or tell tall tales, and most of all, be responsible. This is the best of what mothers provide us, and is something for which we can be grateful. It seems to me that these early childhood lessons are the foundation of our society and the basis for our whole lives, which are relational in their basic nature.

I would like to invite you to take a moment, and think back upon your life and about people in your life who nurtured you, who were as a mother to you. This person may have been your biological mother, or it may have been someone else. What gifts did this person bring
to your life? What wisdom did she share with you? What care did she provide you with, in a time of trials and tribulations in your life? Let’s take a moment to think about this.

[SILENCE]
Thank you.

Who is a mother? And was that person always the person you needed her to be? Over the years I’ve had occasion to sit and talk with many people about their family histories. I’m not talking about anybody in particular here, at all. I just mean, in general. And in talking with people about their family histories, it has become clear to me that some people have reason to feel conflicted about their past relationships with parents. I could go on to talk about “Mommy Dearest,” or paint a picture of you laying on a couch, while a Freudian therapist asks you to tell him about your mother. These little memes gain traction in society, because the people about whom we say them have had such a profound affect on our lives. There’s a thought. Even if one’s memories are such that you’d like to trade them in for better models, one’s parents still have had a profound affect on one’s life.

So, whether your relationship with your mother was a lifelong challenge, or if there is just some little thing about which you’re still bothered, then let’s take some time today to let some of that go…

It seems to me that being a parent must be a never-ending effort, full of thousands of decisions to be made
day-by-day, with really no end in sight. Any human being, from any culture, may take great joy in being a parent, but may also find it to be a lifetime of challenges. It has often been said, our parents were simply doing the best that they could with the tools at their disposal, at that time.

Bearing that in mind, let’s take a few moments to think back at the baggage we each still carry. Think about those times when we wish things had gone differently. If there was something from the long distant past, some disagreement with your mother, let’s consider that... as we look at it through the lens of many years of life that have occurred since then. You are not the same person now, as you were then. Let’s recognize that all of the challenges that our mothers must have faced, and consider what tools they may have had at their disposal back then. As you think about that, think about how you can let it go… We each face challenges in life and the decisions that we make are never easy. That was as true for our mothers, as it is for us. Let’s take another moment, now, to think on this…

[SILENCE]

Thank you.

Albert Ellis wrote that,

*The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide your problems are your own. You do not blame them on your mother, the ecology, or the president.*

*You realize that you control your own destiny.*

I believe that mothers brought us into the world, although
not always in ways consistent with the stereotype of the nuclear family I mentioned earlier. Mothers of all kinds affect our lives, offering the encouraging word just when it is needed. Over the course of our lives, we have each been nurtured by someone – and today is a day to honor them for doing so.

So, let us return to the present day. Let us think about all of the mothers that we know, now. Maybe she’s the person sitting next to you, maybe she is the mother of your grandchildren, maybe she is your next-door neighbor. I encourage you to reach out to her today, to honor her sacrifices, and to express gratitude to her for being a mother of the next generation.

I will go so far as to say, I believe that motherhood is sacred. If we go back to the dawn of time, at least as humans understand it, we see that mothers have always held a sacred role in all cultures. If we go back even further, and look to the animal kingdom and across most species, we still see that mothers have always been someone sacred. Definitions of motherhood vary greatly around the world, and my personal definition is not nearly so rigid as that of some of more conservative people. But regardless of how one may define a mother, mothers are special. Let’s honor them today!

May it ever be so and blessed be you all!
BENEDICTION (by Rev. Michael Walker)

Dear mothers among us,

    Bless you for the gifts of life you have given,
    And the sacrifices you have made for others.

For the mothers who are far away or long ago departed,

    Let us be mindful of the blessings they brought
    Into the lives of each one of us.

And for any difficulties in years past,

    Let us be mindful of the challenges mothers
    provided us, so that we would learn and grow.

Let us be grateful, and celebrate Motherhood

    on this beautiful Spring day!

    *May it ever be so and blessed be you all!*