

**SERVICE LEADER SCRIPT
FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF HAMILTON
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2010**

SERVICE TITLE: FIRE COMMUNION SUNDAY: THE FIRE OF COMMITMENT – MAKING LIFE CHANGES

DESCRIPTION: They say that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Yet, it always seems that something is starting and something is coming to an end in our lives. How we find a sense of the constant in this never-ending cycle of comings and goings is the focus of this service and annual UU ritual.

SPEAKER: Rev. Victoria Ingram

SERVICE LEADER: Lyla Miklos

STORYTELLER: Elizabeth Beckett

MUSICIANS: Paul Hawkins, Roy Dahl, Rachel Derry, and Joanne Dear

READER: Micaela Corcoran

[Chancel should be set up so Podium is to the north side with some Fire Communion/Winter Solstice/Kwanza decorations in front. Have a Kinara on display if you can. The pillar for the singing bowl should be next to podium along with a place for the ushers to set their offering baskets. In the Centre should be the Sanctuary Chalice and last candle on the solid square table that is shorter. In front of the Chalice should be multilevel tables for the candles that will be lit before and after the Fire Communion ritual. The Storyteller Chair will be placed between the two trees preferably on the remaining riser with the storytelling carpet in front. The chairs in front of the Chancel should be cleared to make room for the Fire Communion bowl to sit on another pillar in front of the chancel at Centre Stage.]

1. OVERTURE

(This music will start to play at 10:15am, unless musicians are still rehearsing. The Sanctuary doors should also open at this time.)

2. BELL

LYLA: *(At 10:25am ring the bell in the foyer.)*

(Indicate to the Sound Tech that the service will begin in five more minutes and that you will need your podium mike turned on and the music on CD turned down so everyone can hear you introduce the Gathering Music.)

3. GATHERING MUSIC

Who Would Think That What Was Needed (Bell/Maule)

LYLA: Please quietly take your seats as we enjoy our Gathering Music.

We ask that you turn off any cell phones, pagers, blackberrys, or other electronic devices as they interfere with our sound system and your listening enjoyment during the service.

JOANNE/PAUL/RACHEL/ROY: Who would think that what was needed
to transform and save the earth
might not be a plan or army,
proud in purpose, proved in worth?
Who would think, despite derision,
that a child should lead the way?
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas day.

Shepherds watch and wise men wonder,
monarchs scorn and angels sing;
such a place as none would reckon
hosts a holy helpless thing;
stable beasts and by-passed strangers
watch a baby laid in hay:
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas day.

Centuries of skill and science
span the past from which we move,
yet experience questions whether,
with such progress, we improve.
While the human lot we ponder,
lest our hopes and humour fray,
God surprises earth with heaven,
coming here on Christmas day.

4. SINGING TOGETHER

#361 – Enter, Rejoice, and Come In (STLT)

REV. INGRAM: Good Morning! Please rise as you're able and let's join our voices together in song. This morning we'll sing "Enter, Rejoice, and Come In". This song is hymn #361 in your gray hymnals, but trust me when I tell you that you can follow along with me and sing it without your hymnals.

(Rev. Ingram will give instruction to the congregation on how to sing this song.)

CONGREGANTS: *Enter, rejoice, and come in.*
Enter, rejoice, and come in.
Today will be a joyful day;
Enter, rejoice, and come in.

*Open your ears to the song.
Open your ears to the song.
Today will be a joyful day;
Enter, rejoice, and come in.*

*Open your hearts everyone.
Open your hearts everyone.
Today will be a joyful day;
Enter, rejoice, and come in.*

*Don't be afraid of some change.
Don't be afraid of some change.
Today will be a joyful day;
Enter, rejoice, and come in.*

*Enter, rejoice, and come in.
Enter, rejoice, and come in.
Today will be a joyful day.
Enter, rejoice, and come in.*

5. WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

LYLA: Good Morning!

Welcome to the First Unitarian Church of Hamilton.

Whoever you are, whomever you love, wherever you are on your journey of faith or search for meaning, today you are one of us, and you are welcome in this house of worship.

My name is Lyla Miklos and I am your Service Leader along this morning.

Today is our annual Fire Communion Service. A yearly ritual in which we ceremonial burn away what we want to let go of before a new year begins.

Today is December 26th, Boxing Day, which now seems to be the day to catch a great sale at the mall, but it was originally a day when the church's poor boxes were opened and gift boxes were given to servants, trades people, or others who provide services.

Today is also the start of Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is a weeklong celebration honoring African-American heritage and culture. It features activities such as the lighting of a kinara and libations, and culminates in a feast and gift giving. Maulana Karenga, an Afro-American author, political activist, and college professor, created Kwanzaa in 1966 as the first specifically African American holiday. The name Kwanzaa derives from the Swahili phrase *matunda ya kwanza*, meaning first fruits of the harvest.

Our announcements are part of our life as a church community and we have a few to share this morning.

(Read announcements.)

Today's Music Ministry is provided by Roy Dahl, Joanne Dear, Paul Hawkins, and Rachel Derry.

If you have a personal Joy or Sorrow you would like shared with the congregation paper and pens are available at the table to my right ***[indicate with hand gesture]***. Please write yours out before the Fire Communion Ritual ends.

This service is also piped into the lobby if you need to step out of the sanctuary.

After our worship please join our Fellowship in the lobby. If you are a newcomer please visit our newcomers table so you may know us better and take a green mug for your beverage so we may know you better.

6. SINGING BOWL

LYLA: I invite you all to be comfortable, close your eyes if you wish, and listen to the sound of our singing bowl until it disappears.

(play the singing bowl . . . and fade)

7. CALL TO WORSHIP
By Eric A. Heller-Wagner

REV. INGRAM: Blessed is the fire that burns deep in the soul. It is the flame of the human spirit touched into being by the mystery of life. It is the fire of reason; the fire of compassion; the fire of community; the fire of justice; the fire of faith. It is the fire of love burning deep in the human heart; the divine glow in every life.

8. LIGHTING OF SANCTUARY AND CHILDREN'S CHAPEL CHALICES

REV. INGRAM: We light our chalices to mark our entry into sacred space.

I invite Micaela Corcoran to come forward to light our Sanctuary Chalice and Elizabeth Beckett to come forward to light our Children's Chapel Chalices.

(Chalice Lighter lights chalices and stay at Chalices until the Unison Chalice Lighting Words have been read.)

9. UNISON CHALICE LIGHTING WORDS

REV. INGRAM: Please join in reading our Unison Chalice Lighting Words, found in your Order of Service.

May this candle be our light of friendship and love.

Thank you chalice lighters.

10. HYMN

#359 – When We Have Gathered (STLT)

REV. INGRAM: Please stand as you are able and join together in singing hymn #359 *When We Have Gathered*.

CONGREGATION: When we have gathered
For a time of worship and of song
Let none forget the joys and griefs
That mark each path of life,
And thus we reach for those who love
We reach for those who love

For youth shall pass
And time is wise
And countless seasons turn
So day by day our years increase
Until at last by life release
Our spirits shine like stars,
Our spirits shine like stars.

11. STORY FOR ALL AGES

Duck at the Door by Jackie Urbanovic

ELIZABETH: Children and youth come and sit on the carpet here in front of me as we share in our Story for All Ages. Today's story is called "*Duck at the Door*".

It was quiet until . . .

THUNK, CREAK, and KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!

(Someone is out there!)

"LET'S GO ASK IRENE! SHE ALWAYS KNOWS WHAT TO DO."

"Irene!" cried Brody. "Help! Someone is knocking on our door!"

"It's the middle of the night," said Irene. "Who could be knocking on our door?"

It's a DUCK!

Irene brought the duck inside.

"My name is Max," he began. "I was born in the spring, and I loved it. I stayed behind when my flock flew south because I thought I'd love winter too. But it turned out to be COLD and very lonely."

"Winter isn't so bad when you have a warm home," said Irene.

At first Max had a lot to learn.

In January he learned to use the remote control. (He enjoyed Wild Kingdom and World Wide Wrestling.)

In February he discovered he had a flair for cooking.

By March he had made himself right at home.

But by April it was clear that Max had learned too much. (There goes another Saturday night! Gimme! Another rerun! Rerun! I've got it memorized! ACK.)

Dakota, Coco, and Jesse Bear got tired of Max's new recipes. (Max's Tofu Surprise! Shish Kebob A La Max, and Max's Seaweed Chowder.)

And Brody was just tired.

Someone had to talk to Max.

But WHO?

Just then Max burst into the room yelling, "Listen to the quacking! My flock has returned! I can't wait to see them."

"Irene, please keep my chef's hat. And Brody, you can have my rubber duckies. I will miss you all so much!"

After many hugs, Max left.

With Max gone, life was ordinary again. (No you go first. No, you.)

The cats went back to eating plain food. No one played keep-away with the remote control. (What else can we do for fun?)

And Brody didn't have to share his bed.

Life was so quiet that by October, everyone was happy to hear the sound of quacking. When there was a knock at the door everyone was hoping the same thing. (Max? Max? Max? Max? Max? Max? Max?)

“MAX!” they shouted with joy. “Are you staying with us all winter?” they asked.

“Yes,” said Max, “Me and . . .

. . . MY FLOCK!” Everyone looked at Irene, hoping she would say something.

But all she could say was “WELCOME HOME!”

LYLA: Children and Youth we are now going to ask you to return to your seats and stay a little longer in the Sanctuary so you can take part in our annual Fire Communion ritual. Once the ceremony is over we will sing you back to CYRE.

12. FIRE COMMUNION RITUAL

Ceremony Words (Liz Benjamin and Victoria Weinstein)

Ceremony Music (Various Piano Selections)

LYLA: The ushers have given you scraps of flash paper on which to inscribe those things from which we would seek to unburden ourselves. We now invite you to write on them if you haven't done so already.

We want you to be safe while you partake in our annual Fire Communion Ritual. The pieces of paper you have written on are called flash paper. They burn very quickly and brightly when you place them in the flame. Try to roll up your sleeves if you are wearing something that could drape into the fire, to make sure neither you nor your clothing catches on fire. We have also placed a bucket of water nearby just in case.

Please pay attention as I demonstrate how to place the paper into the flame.

[Lyla will demonstrate how to safely burn your paper.]

REV. INGRAM: Now may we invoke the power of the four elements.

[Lyla lights the East (Air) Candle]

REV. INGRAM: We call to the east and the element of Air. Winter is the time for cold winds and freezing breezes.

CONGREGATION: Spirits of the air, be with us today.

[Lyla lights the South (Fire) Candle]

REV. INGRAM: We call to the south and the element of Fire. Winter is the time for sitting in front of roaring fires for warmth, and blazing candles for light.

CONGREGATION: Spirits of fire, be with us today.

[Lyla lights the West (Water) Candle]

REV. INGRAM: We call to the west and the element of water. Winter is the time of snow, of water turning to ice, and Jack Frost nipping at us.

CONGREGATION: Spirits of the water, be with us today.

[Lyla lights the North (Earth) Candle]

REV. INGRAM: We call to the North and the element of Earth. Winter is the time when the earth is bare, and most trees have no leaves. No food is growing now.

CONGREGATION: Spirits of the earth, be with us today.

REV. INGRAM: The ushers have given you scraps of flash paper on which to inscribe those things from which we would seek to unburden ourselves. We now invite you to come to the Burning Bowl and consign them to the purifying flames while our Music Ministers share our Fire Communion Music.

[Music Ministers sing/play while congregants put pieces of flash paper into the fire.]

REV. INGRAM: The seasons turn, we bring the light, we raise the sun from dark of night.

We Extinguish our North Candle

[Lyla extinguishes North Candle]

CONGREGATION: Spirits of earth we thank you for being with us and we bid you farewell.

REV. INGRAM: We Extinguish our West Candle

[Lyla extinguishes West Candle]

CONGREGATION: Spirits of water we thank you for being with us and we bid you farewell.

REV. INGRAM: We Extinguish our South Candle

[Lyla extinguishes South Candle]

CONGREGATION: Spirits of fire we thank you for being with us and we bid you farewell.

REV. INGRAM: We Extinguish our East Candle

[Lyla extinguishes East Candle]

CONGREGATION: Spirits of air we thank you for being with us and we bid you farewell.

REV. INGRAM: Our ritual is ended. May what you have released here be forever gone from your spirit and cease to trouble you. May you be relieved and renewed, ever mindful that love is always more powerful than fear, and that compassion is the key to freedom from resentment. Merry meet and merry part and merry meet again.

11. CHILDREN'S RECESSIONAL HYMN

***As You Go* (Suzelle Lynch and John Ruben Piirainen)**

****** This section was deleted on the day of the service, as there was NO children in attendance. ******

LYLA: Adults please stand if you are able.

Elizabeth Beckett please receive The Children's Chapel Chalice. Children and youth please line up behind Elizabeth.

Everyone, please join us in singing our Children's Recessional Hymn, found in your order of service.

*As you go may joy surround you, as you go, go in peace.
Know our love is with you always, as you go, as you go.*

Please be seated.

14. READING

From *The Ark* by Micaela Corcoran

LYLA: Our reading today is taken from the Hamilton Spectator and Hamilton Public Library's 2010 Power of the Pen award winning short story, *The Ark*, written by congregant Micaela Corcoran. Please welcome Micaela to the pulpit.

MICAELA: At first, the animals didn't believe it. When Noah made the announcement that only two members of each species would be allowed to survive a flood that would wipe out all the rest, they could not begin to fathom what kind of sadistic deity would commit such slaughter. Yes, the humans sin continually. But why would this "God" being eliminate all the animals save for two of each species? What had they ever done

to deserve such a decree, except to ensure the widespread and untrue opinion they were soulless, and allow themselves to be enslaved to the two-legged race.

From those animals that banded together, clung to their families, or bitterly renounced a God that would kill them for no reason, rose a group that rebelled against their fate. They became revolutionaries that tried to persuade more and more of their bestial brethren to fight against the flood. They staged protests and gathered in great numbers.

One day, as the colossal storm clouds in the sky continued to spread and thicken into ever more imposing greys, the members of the rebellion went to Noah. They walked on hooves and pads and flippers, or crawled with many legs or slower limbs, or slid along, slick atop the grass, or swung from the trees towards his wooden house. Some galloped towards the prospect of saving their future. Others reluctantly sauntered along, afraid of what they thought was sure to lead to the inevitable.

The first to reach Noah's house by land were those known for their speed; members of the large cat families, many canine breeds, horses and hawks. No longer did the animals regard each other as hunter or prey. They had abolished the hierarchy that reigned the Animal Kingdom long since hearing the news. So now, they sat as one in front of Noah, ready to begin the argument for their lives.

"How can you do this?"

"It is not I that will bring about the flood. I am only a vessel through which God will implement His great plan for His children."

"Does God feel nothing for us animals? We are his children too!"

"You are not His children, but His pets. And clearly He cares enough to ensure the survival of each of your species."

"But only two of each of us? Could no more be saved? Could the boat not be bigger? Could there not be more than one made?"

"No dear ones. It is God's wish that only two of each of you survive. To doubt his wisdom is to doubt the purity of the new world he has willed to be. Do you not see? You along with the humans must learn humility, trust, and acceptance. Can you not feel the peace and promise of the day and the rain pour will cease? You must rejoice without question your part in His plan." At this Noah smiled, enraptured by his own words, seeing nothing else but the white light he expected on the day of the new land.

At this the animals gave up, for they did not share the vision Noah embraced so wholeheartedly. If their survival would compromise the "purity of God's new world" then it was not to be a place in which they wanted to live.

Eventually, after the sky had evolved from slate grey to charcoal black, and to purple tinged with onyx, all knew it was time for the few representatives to board the boat. They clung to their families, nuzzled their offspring, bade farewell to parents, gave siblings one last touch. Then all at once, yet painstakingly slow, they made their way up the wooden ramp, bracing themselves for the prolonged dampness that would purge man of sin and evil, and efface all else of innocence and good.

The rest of the beasts and the creatures resigned to watching the door of the ark close without them felt nothing. A bleakness that did not reflect hope, faith, sadness, or even resistance. Some might call it acceptance, others, submission. Either way, they were there. An unalterable fact that carried an unyielding consequence.

All lay down, not just among species, but as one. A lemur perched atop a tortoise, several felines upon an elk, a beaver alongside a moth. They slowed their breathing and their hearts. They slipped towards slumber as they waited patiently for their lives to be extinguished. The wind blew in flurries over their comfortably heaped bodies; they were beyond cold, beyond the frightened calls of the panicked humans, beyond even the address of God and the vindictive words of Noah. They were with each other. No barriers. No placements. No hierarchy. No walls.

They knew then the lesson was not following a blind faith for a single wisdom above, as Noah had preached. Rather, companionship, Togetherness. Love.

And as one little lemming lifted his head to the sky, blinked steadily and laid his head upon the camel he nestled against, the first of the raindrops began to fall.

15. OFFERING WORDS **From O. Eugene Pickett**

LYLA: Thank you Micaela.

Our offering is a reminder of the spirit of generosity that is at the heart of our religious community. Your financial contributions are appreciated and make a difference. We thank you for giving as generously as you are able.

Please join me in reading our offering words, which can be found in your order of service.

(Give congregants a moment to find their place in the gray hymnal or order of service.)

(Read reading along with the congregation.)

CONGREGATION: *We give thanks this day. We pray that we may live not by our fears, but by our hopes, not by our words, but by our deeds.*

16. OFFERTORY MUSIC

Love Changes Everything (Rice/Webber)

LYLA: We will now receive our offering while we listen to our Music Ministers.

(If necessary, cue the musicians to play the offertory music. Let the ushers collect the offering while the music plays.)

JOANNE/PAUL/RACHEL/ROY: Love,

Love changes everything:

Hands and faces,

Earth and sky,

Love,

Love changes everything:

How you live and

How you die

Love

Can make the summer fly,

Or a night

Seem like a lifetime.

Yes, Love,

Love changes everything:

Now I tremble

At your name.

Nothing in the

World will ever

Be the same.

Love,

Love changes everything:

Days are longer,

Words mean more.

Love,

Love changes everything:

Pain is deeper

Than before.

Love

Will turn your world around,

And that world

Will last for ever.

Yes, Love,

Love changes everything,

Brings you glory,

Brings you shame.
Nothing in the
World will ever
Be the same.

Why did I go back to see her...?

Off
Into the world we go,
Planning futures,
Shaping years.
Love,
Bursts in, and suddenly
All our wisdom
Disappears.
Love
Makes fools of everyone:
All the rules
We make are broken.

Yes, Love,
Love changes everyone.
Live or perish
In its flame.
Love will never,
Never let you
Be the same.

17. OFFERTORY HYMN OF GRATITUDE
Hymn #402 – From You I Receive – STLT (Joseph and Nathan Segal)

LYLA: As our Ushers bring our offering forward please join in singing our Hymn of Gratitude found in your order of service.

CONGREGATION: *From you I receive, to you I give, together we share, and from this we live.*

18. JOYS AND SORROWS

REV. INGRAM: This is our time as a church community to come together to celebrate and grieve with our fellow congregants, supporting each other through both our struggles and our victories.

During the musical meditation, you are invited to come forward, and light a candle. Then we will join together in a time of silence and reflection.

These are the Joys and Sorrows we share today.

(Read written joys and sorrows.)

19. MEDITATION IN WORDS
By Liz Benjamin

REV. INGRAM: Our Meditation in Words comes from Liz Benjamin.

In the greatest darkness
Out of winter's cold
From our deepest fears
When we most despair
When all seems lost
When the earth lies waste
When animals hide
When the leaves are gone
When the river is frozen
When the ground is hard
Shadows are fleeing
Light is returning
Warmth will come again
Summer will be here once more
Plants will grow again
Animals will be seen once more
Green will come again
Life will continue

20. MEDITATION IN MUSIC
The Hills Are Bare In Bethlehem (Scherf/Somerville)

(The Musicians will now present the Meditation in Music and congregants will then proceed to light candles. If necessary, cue the musicians to play the musical meditation.)

JOANNE/PAUL/RACHEL/ROY: The hills are bare at Bethlehem,
No future for the world they show;
Yet here new life begins to grow,
From earth's old dust a greenwood stem.

The stars are cold at Bethlehem,
No warmth for those beneath the sky;
Yet here the radiant angels fly,
and joy burns new, a fi'ry gem.

The heart is tired at Bethlehem,

No human dream unbroken stands;
Yet here God comes to mortal hands,
And hope renewed cries out: "Amen!"

21. MEDITATION IN SILENCE

(Gently hit the singing bowl once after the music ends.)

(Wait at least one minute, two minutes if possible.)

(Ring bell.)

22. ONE LAST CANDLE

(Light the "Last Candle")

REV. INGRAM: We light this last candle for all those joys and sorrows, which remain, in our hearts until the time comes to speak them aloud. Whatever our level of sharing, may this community be a blessing and support to us all.

23. UNISON WORDS OF SUPPORT By May Sarton

REV. INGRAM: Please join me in reading our unison words of support found in your order of service.

CONGREGATION: *Help us to be the always hopeful gardeners of the spirit, who know that without darkness, nothing comes to birth. As without light, nothing flowers.*

24. HYMN #72 – *Has Summer Come Now, Dawning* (STLT)

REV. INGRAM: Please stand as you are able and join together in singing hymn number #72 from your grey hymnal entitled *Has Summer Come Now, Dawning*.

CONGREGATION: *Has summer come now,
Dawning amidst the winter's snows?
And shall we nest the tiny birds
Within the pine tree's boughs?
And shall we nest the tiny birds
Within the pine tree's boughs?*

*Already now the candles
Have blossom'd on the tree
To light the longest winter night
For all of us to see*

*To light the longest winter night
For all of us to see*

*The old one now made youthful,
Just like a child at play,
The bending back now straighten'd
So in our hearts we pray,
The bending back now straighten'd
So in our hearts we pray.*

*In all our hearts is kindled
A hearth-fire so sublime.
Would that this yuletide spirit
Be with us for a time.
Would that this yuletide spirit
Be with us for a time.*

25. SERMON
The Fire Of Commitment – Making Life Changes

REV. INGRAM: TBD

26. HYMN
#1028 – The Fire of Commitment (STJ)

REV. INGRAM: Please stand as you are able and join together in singing hymn number #1028 from your aqua hymnal entitled *The Fire of Commitment*.

CONGREGATION: *From the light of days remembered
Burns a beacon bright and clear
Guiding hands and hearts and spirits
Into faith set free from fear*

*When the fire of commitment
Sets our minds and soul ablaze
When our hunger and our passion
Meet to call us on our way
When we live with deep assurance
Of the flame that burns within
Then our promise finds fulfillment
And our future can begin*

*From the stories of our living
Rings a song both brave and free
Calling pilgrims still to witness
To the life of liberty*

*When the fire of commitment
Sets our minds and soul ablaze
When our hunger and our passion
Meet to call us on our way
When we live with deep assurance
Of the flame that burns within
Then our promise finds fulfillment
And our future can begin*

*From the dreams of youthful vision
Comes a new prophetic voice
Which demands a deeper justice
Built by courageous choice*

*When the fire of commitment
Sets our minds and soul ablaze
When our hunger and our passion
Meet to call us on our way
When we live with deep assurance
Of the flame that burns within
Then our promise finds fulfillment
And our future can begin*

**27. CHALICE EXTINGUISHED/GOING FORTH
By Kathleen McTigue**

LYLA: Please be seated as I share our Going Forth words. We have several chalices this morning to extinguish.

I ask Micaela Corcoran to come forward to extinguish our Sanctuary Chalice.

I ask Elizabeth Beckett to come forward to extinguish our Children's Chapel Chalice.

I ask Sue Ryan to come forward to extinguish our Fire Communion Chalice.

I ask Catherine Silverglen to come forward to extinguish our Kwanzaa Kinara.

What shall we do with this great gift of Time, this year?

*Let us begin by remembering that whatever justice, whatever peace and wholeness
might bloom in our world this year,*

*We are the hearts and minds, the hands and feet, the embodiment of all the best visions
of our people.*

The new year can be new ground for the seeds of our dreams.

Let us take the step forward together, onto new ground,

Planting our dreams well, faithfully, and in joy.

28. POSTLUDE
Walk On (Stommen)

LYLA: Please remain seated for our postlude.

(If necessary, cue the musicians to play the Postlude.)

JOANNE/PAUL/RACHEL/ROY: TBD

LYLA: Please join our Fellowship in the lobby. If you are a newcomer please visit our newcomers table so you may know us better and take a green mug for your beverage so we may know you better. Merry meet and merry part and merry meet again.

29. LEAVING MUSIC

30. FELLOWSHIP HOUR