

**Dancing Into Spring**  
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**Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Outer Banks**  
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The old rituals, hymns, and scriptures that Norbert Capek had grown up with didn't work for him any more, because they were reenactments or retellings of an ancient story from a distant land, which had lost meaning for him and for his people. He wanted new music, new poetry, new ceremonies that were grounded in their own time, in their own place, and that expressed their new beliefs. The most powerful, most enduring religious rituals are always like that: Ritual *physically embodies* the community's shared faith commitments. You can read the faith in the form and qualities of the ritual.

Take the Flower Communion. While I think it's important to know where and how it began, we don't celebrate it to remember Norbert and Maja Capek. It's grounded in the particular and present moment that we're living in, and in this place. We have the flowers we do because it's Springtime, and many of them particularly because we live here, not somewhere else in the world. The flowers come in all different kinds and sizes and shapes and colors. Just like us, and just as we believe about all people, each one is unique, precious, and beautiful just as it is. Yet the flowers were even more beautiful together, just as we believe that people blossom when we live together in community.

We know that the flowers aren't created by human beings, but by a power of life that still eludes our understanding. We can plant them, and help them along, and cut them, and bring them here, but we can't *make* real living flowers. So we're reminded in our ritual of our place in the web of nature; we're *part* of the world, not *apart* from it, and even though we believe human beings are very important, we know we're not the measure of all things.

I invite you to take a moment with that flower that came to you this morning.

Allow yourself simply to witness the flower, to observe it without describing in words what you're experiencing, but just to be aware of your senses, your sight, touch, and smell as they reach out to rest on the flower. Don't name; just notice.

See its complex colors. Trace the shape of its stem. Feel the textures of the petals, the leaves, the stalks. Breathe in the scent of its different parts.

Let your senses take you deeply into connection with the flower, allowing yourself to experience in imagination the delicate quality of the trembling petals or cups of the blossom. Now even as you observe its delicacy, feel the immense energy that brings this celebration of life up out of the ground, or through the tough skin of a tree's bark, from roots reaching deep into the earth to buds offering themselves to the sun's light, to the air and breeze, to the rain.

Feel the strength that sustains and drives this delicate, living thing through the cycles of its life. That energy is your energy as well, your life, the beautiful life you share with these

blossoms, with the plants and trees and bushes they emerged from, with the creatures that find shelter and food in them.

The life of flowers is the life we all share.

The Flower Communion is a celebration of that life, not in some abstract sense, not as a remembered story lived long ago and retold today, but Life right here and now, here in your hand—in the flower in your hand and in the hand that holds the flower and in the hand that brought the flower here today—the one great common life we share with this flower, with all the flowers, trees, grasses, and shrubs, with all the animal world, with each other in this precious circle and in the whole ever-expanding circle of humankind. One life.

In a few minutes now, we'll take our flowers outside and use them to decorate an altar there while we dance the Maypole. Though our pole with its ribbons and our way of dancing it are modern, the Maypole has ancient Northern European roots. Its origins are not clear, but most interpretations of the Maypole ritual connect with fertility—a ceremony to ensure fertility in the animals and the people; a rite to guarantee a successful and fruitful planting season. May 1<sup>st</sup> is Beltane in the Celtic and Wiccan pagan traditions, a festival of renewal and beginnings marked by the lighting of bonfires.

For us, dancing the Maypole is a way of honoring the earth-based traditions of our ancestors, who celebrated Spring in many ways, mostly festive and often a little wild. But it can also be something a little more, like the Flower Communion, a ritual grounded in this time, in this place, marking not just an ancient tradition but something that is really happening in the world right now.

Like the Flower Communion, dancing the Maypole is a celebration of Life. The rhythm of life, the power of fertility, the rising tide of life in the Springtime of the world are all very real; they are all around us, and they move in each of us, too. We are part of the same dance that brings around the flowers every year, that sends the smilax, jasmine, and wisteria climbing up into the trees, that gives birth to the new young creatures you can see in the woods and fields all around us.

That's the reality we're celebrating as we dance into Spring around our Maypole outside. It's right that the celebration should be joyful and even a little rowdy; fertility is like that. Yet there's an inner solemnity to it as well, for we're participating not just in an ancient ceremony but in an ongoing reality that is absolutely essential for our continued life on the planet.

We don't believe that the Spring won't come or the seeds won't thrive or the babies won't be born if we don't dance. To be honest, I don't really think the ancients were ever that literal-minded either. But it is true that our participation in the dance of life—in its cycle through birth, fertility, thriving, declining, death, decay, and back around again—our participation in that dance is not optional. And we need the rest of the living world to dance through the cycle as well; our very survival depends on it.

So let's go dancing into Spring, with delight and with the profound knowledge that we are inseparably part of the natural world we celebrate. But before we go outside, let's sing—a song of celebration and joy at the beautiful colors of the flowers we've shared together today!