

Mothering-Given and Received – delivered by Marlene Lieb, Mother’s Day 2021

Good Morning!

## Opening words:

Storytelling has been a part of our humanity since the dawn of our human experience. In the retelling of our stories, passed down for thousands of years through generations, we create community. My friend, Hazel (*also a longtime UU.*) loves to encourage people to tell their stories, because she firmly believes that EVERY person has interesting stories to tell, that teach us about life and each other. In fact, Hazel coordinates a service at our fellowship every year in which volunteer congregants interview each other, opening the doors to insights that allows us to explore our own stories. Today, I will be following Hazel’s lead by focusing on three stories regarding mothers, motherhood, and mothering. I will begin with a quick telling of my own story, followed by the story of the origin of Mother’s Day and how that relates to our UU philosophy, and ending with a brief exercise that will allow you to share a small snippet of your own story. In the spirit of sharing and community, Rob will sing our opening hymn....

**Chalice Lighting** : *John O’Donohue*

*“Blessed be those who have loved you into becoming who you were meant to be.”*

## First Hymn- Come Sing a Song With Me (*Rob Lieb*)

## Sharing of Joys and Concerns

### Presentation

As some of you know, our family have been active members of the UU church for 35 years, and, especially on Mother’s Day, I am thrilled to be in this UU gathering with our daughter, Erin... and especially happy that she has chosen to be a part of your congregation.

Like every one of you here, I had a birth mother. She was fun and energetic and a great listener and I always, always felt loved and supported by her. When I was 14 years old, my mom was diagnosed with throat cancer, and she died two years later on May 6th at the age of 39. It was just a few days before Mother’s Day and I remember laying the card I had chosen for her in her coffin. I was 16 years old at the time, the middle of two sisters, aged 19 and 12. I feel so fortunate to have had my mother for long enough to remember her smile, and can vividly recollect joyful times like dancing in our living room, entertaining our huge extended family at holiday gatherings, making me banana cake and eggplant parmesan every year for me on my birthday. Her death left a hole that I thought would be hollow forever. It didn’t take long to realize, however, that I was surrounded by nurturing women: Sister Loretta, who pulled me out of school, held me, and walked with me in silence. Mrs. Wallace, our next-door neighbor and her two young adult daughters, who passed us food over the yard fence and checked on us

regularly. My best friend's mom, who took me under her wing and invited me into their family's lives with open and loving arms. My Aunt Rosie, who slept with me when she came to visit, and talked with me long into the night. My own 19-year-old sister, who became the instant matriarch well before her time. All of these women taught ME how to love and nurture and built on the Foundation that my own mother had gifted me. When I later married into my best friend's family by marrying her brother, my loving mother-in-law remained in my life well into my adulthood, providing all of the love she showed each of her 6 children. I was blessed by giving birth to two magnificent human beings. Some of you may have met our son, Jason, and, of course, you all know Erin. Being their mom has been the greatest joy of my life. But I did learn from my past that the love one has to give, isn't limited. There is so much more we all have to give away. So, when Erin's long time young friend, Cheryl, needed guidance and love, we took her into our home. Cheryl is our daughter of the heart, and Erin's sister in every way that counts. You may have also met her, as she comes to visit St. John often with her husband and two beautiful children.

After Erin and Cheryl left home, Rob and I decided that we did a pretty good job with these young in's so we became certified foster parents. Over the next 6 years we provided emergency shelter to 11 children, and a long-term home to two others, Joe and Lilly. It has been 15 years since they left us and over those years, we welcomed other young family members to our home, staying with us as they prepared for and started new careers. I tell you all of this to demonstrate that "mothering" does not always have to come from one's biological mother. It comes from mentoring, and guiding, and loving- the sharing of our hearts, our homes, our lives. I feel sure all of us have done this for others during our lifetimes. So today, we can all certainly honor the Mother who gave us life, but we must also recognize that "mothering", both given and received, comes in many shapes and sizes. And for the men that are with us today, the same certainly holds true for Fathers and Father figures, whom we will celebrate with glee in June!

We will now have a musical interlude. Remember the best friend I mentioned who lovingly welcomed me into her family? That best friend is now my sister-in-law, Barbara, and she has been in my life since we were 8 years old. She is here today with her eldest daughter, Katie, who gets both her beauty and her talent from her mom, so it seemed most appropriate to have them sing together for us this morning.

**Musical Interlude:** (*Barb and Katie*)

And now it is time to tell you story number two. It's about three dedicated, humanitarian women whose work for peace and justice actually led us to today: Mother's Day.

Traditional celebrations of mothers and motherhood have existed throughout the world over thousands of years, many of them pagan in origin, others centering around Christianity and the blessed Virgin Mary as the Mother of God.

Our modern view of Mother's Day, however, began in 1870, when Julia Ward Howe wrote the "*Mother's Day Proclamation*," a call to action that asked mothers to unite in promoting world peace. As a renowned pacifist, she was also an advocate for abolitionism and a social activist, particularly for suffrage. In 1873 Howe campaigned for a "Mother's Peace Day" to be celebrated every June 2.

Some 40 years later, wishing to commemorate the humanitarian work of her own mother, Ann Jarvis took up the cause. Jarvis had been a peace activist who cared for wounded soldiers on both sides of the American Civil War. She continued urging for the creation of a Mother's Day dedicated to peace. In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed a congressional resolution officially making the second Sunday in May the national Mother's Day, and crediting Ann Jarvis as the Founder of Mother's Day.

Years later, Constance Adelaide Smith, remembering that Julia Ward Howe's mission extended beyond honoring mothers, and focusing more on women **gathering for social activism**, successfully advocated for Mothering Sunday as a commemoration of a broader definition of motherhood. Mothering Sunday is still celebrated in many parts of the English-speaking world.

Other women's groups have also used the holiday as a time to highlight the need for equal rights and access to childcare; advocate for the support of underprivileged women and children, and to teach women how to properly care for children. All admirable causes.

I was surprised to learn that Mother's Day yields the highest church attendance after Christmas Eve and Easter. One can only speculate that children return to church on this day out of respect for their church-going mothers, or, as is the case in Catholic church, to honor Mary, the mother of Jesus. I am not sure if that statistic holds true in UU churches, but assuming it might- here are a few other reasons UU's may find this day meaningful.

Compare the social causes that has been advanced by the women involved in the creation of this holiday, with those which we as UU's hold most dear:

The most continuous and prominent cause of Julia, Ann and Constantine was **Peace**

Compare that to our 6<sup>th</sup> principal: *The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all*. That one certainly aligns directly

Support of underprivileged women and children

Sure sounds a lot like our 1<sup>st</sup> principle: *The inherent worth and dignity of every person*

Equal rights and access to childcare

The ending of slavery

A woman's right to vote

All supported by our 2nd principle: *Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations*

This day touches upon the deepest truths of our religious tradition.

These are obvious and consistent alignments, making Mother's Day a most relevant and joyous occasion for all UU's!

## Guided Meditation

So-as my friend Hazel would say: what is YOUR story? Take a moment to think of someone you might wish to honor today. It could be your biological mother, another woman who guided you with motherly love, or someone to whom you offered guidance, caring and wisdom. Following our closing hymn, I invite all of you to share your commemorative story with us, as we continue to meet in community.

## Discussion with group / Q / A

Hymn # 95 There is More Love Somewhere (*Rob Lieb*)

Let this Mother's Day be a reminder to all of us to be grateful for the joy, the love, and the peace -given and received. Blessings Be.

**Offering** read together before passing basket: reading is inside the cover of the Hymnal  
*"Devine love flowing through me, blesses and multiplies all that I am, all that I have, all that I give and all that I receive*

Reading by Maya Angelou:

Hope is born again in the faces of children  
It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their sunsets.  
Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things,  
Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.  
In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.  
At first it is too soft. Then only half heard.  
We listen carefully as it gathers strength.  
We hear a sweetness.  
The word is **Peace**.  
It is loud now. It is louder.  
Louder than the explosion of bombs.  
We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence.  
It is what we have hungered for.  
Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.

A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.  
Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.