

Reflections...

In creating the Worship Service "Coming Home Like Rivers to the Sea" we were beginning to reach for new and inclusive symbols and rituals that speak to our connectedness to one another, to the totality of life and to our place on this planet. We moved in an intuitive response to the potential of water as a symbol of women's spirituality. Its universality emerged with our increased awareness of its presence and deep meaning in our lives.

Central to this service is the water ceremony--the bringing of water by women. Each brings a container of water that has special meaning to her. She shares with the group why this water is significant to her and what it symbolizes in her life. As she speaks she adds her water to a common bowl. When the water is mingled it is then experienced in some way by the women gathered together. We have found that the meaning of the water grows with time and that the opportunity to take a small portion during or after the service to be carried away is important. The collected water thus journeys on into individual lives and often flows into a common bowl at other water ceremonies.

The vital parts of the ceremony are the bringing of the waters, the sharing of meaning, the experiencing of the intermingled waters by the group and the taking of the waters from the ritual.

The water ceremony names water as a symbol close to women, reflective of and enabling to our daily lives. The ceremony flows from what the participants bring to it, releasing an articulation of what is vital, rooted, and connected to us. In small gatherings each woman can bring water and speak of its meaning to her. In large groups, such as the one in East Lansing, a number of women participate in the name of all.

The ceremony is personal and transcendent. Women have celebrated these waters in many different ways--alone, in private rituals; with a friend, sometimes sharing the gathering of the water; with groups of women, large and small; with groups of women and men. We have been in small groups who circled the bowl, putting our hands in it; we have witnessed the water passed around the circle as women used it to heal one another. We have seen ceremonies spontaneously shaped in the moment or carefully planned, each portion reflected upon. The ritual, as it continues, deepens in meaning for us, just as water deepens after its long and winding journey to sea.

As water changes form and moves in a life-giving cycle, so this ceremony must move in process, in change, in motion--always reflective of and integral to the time and the people creating it. In reading and using this service it is important to note that the water ceremony was woven into a worship service. Creating the service has its own value in what it gave to us. It brought us together for many hours of sharing and conversation, planning, creating, critiquing, clarifying--it called us to articulation, to pulling foggy-shaped thought into words. We each spoke and listened, wrote down one another's words, spoke them back with added meaning. It was one of the most bonding and empowering experiences of our lives.

We urge you also to reach for the depth and inclusiveness of this and other symbols that speak to women and draw from our daily experiences. We need symbols with enabling power that connect us with what we most deeply value and empower our expression of this in our lives.

Lucille Schuck *Carolyn McDade*

COMING HOME--LIKE RIVERS TO THE SEA

SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHERLESS CHILD

solo by Carolyn McDade

CENTERING

Lucile Schuck

THE MEANING OF THE WATERS

Carolyn McDade

BRINGING OF THE WATERS

Local -a stream in East Lansing

Linda Pinti

Desert - near Albuquerque

Marinell Hartogensis

Mountain Lake in New York State

Edith Fletcher

Assiniboine River in Winnipeg

Jean Bramadet

Rain Water from Maryland

Jean Zoerheide

Mouth of the Mississippi

Vivian Guild

Pacific Ocean

Rosemary Matson

Atlantic Ocean

Pat Simon

WHEN MY SISTER CALLS I'LL ANSWER

Carolyn McDade

COMING HOME TO OUR WOMEN'S IDENTITY

Lucile Schuck

TAKING THE WATERS

EMPOWERMENT

QUESTIONING

IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY

ENERGY AND LOYALTY

LOVE

SHARING OF THE WATERS

Lucile Schuck

COMING HOME

Carolyn McDade

Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child

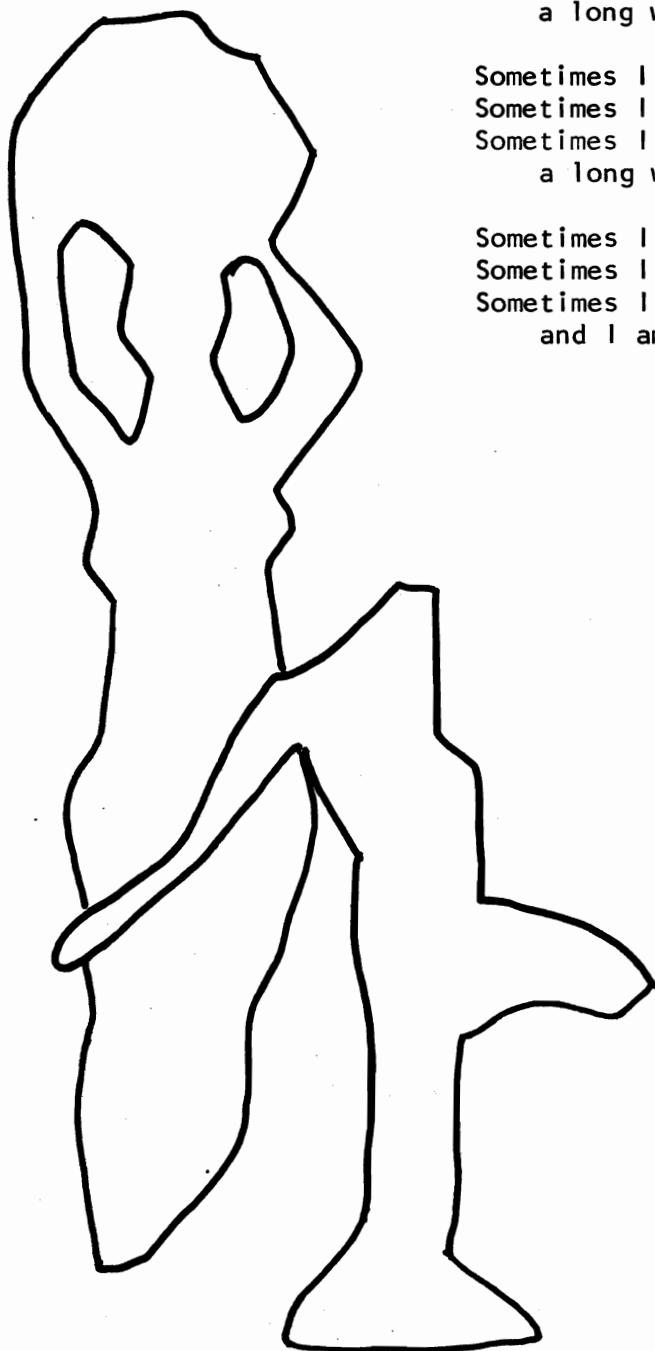
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
a long way from home, a long way from home

Sometimes I feel like I've never been heard
Sometimes I feel like I've never been heard
Sometimes I feel like I've never been heard
a long way from home, a long way from home

Sometimes I feel like I've never been seen
Sometimes I feel like I've never been seen
Sometimes I feel like I've never been seen
a long way from home, a long way from home

Sometimes I feel like the day has come
Sometimes I feel like the day has come
Sometimes I feel like the day has come
and I am coming home, and I am coming home

Traditional Spiritual
Adapted



CENTERING:

In recent times--say, during the last three thousand years--religions have been about the empowerment of men. Women have been lost - unseen and unheard. We gather on this occasion to lift up our woman identity, our self-understanding.

We come with our yearning to find her who acknowledges our birth and our presence, who nurtures life and spirit. It is she who is ourselves -- she who, upon meeting, we recognize and need no introduction. It is she who gives birth to all we are and can be -- to ideas, thoughts, words and songs -- to foggy shaped longings and to fiery rage and to all encompassing love. She is the center inside ourselves which is our truest truth, our primary honesty -- that being, tender, insistent and passionate toward survival and wholeness. We give birth to her as she gives birth to us as we give birth to one another.

We come together, making our way like rivers, from places distant and near, to give shape to a new spirituality, for there is no theology that calls women to strength rather than to support of others strength -- that calls women to action rather than to passivity -- that calls women to full expression rather than to meek acceptance.

Recognizing that, we see that we must question every box, every definition, every assignment from an authority outside our own be-ings so that we can create and recreate for ourselves the rituals and symbols that give meaning to us.

So we come together to question, to hear, to share, to speak, to inspire and to celebrate through new rituals, knowing that our energy and our love are transforming.

Let us now, for this ritual celebrating our connectedness, choose water as our symbol of empowerment. As rivers in cycle release their waters and regain new beginnings so do we cycle. For us, as women, these beginnings are powerful, but not easy. But still, we come to create and to celebrate and to live by the only spirituality worthy of our devotion -- a spirituality that uplifts, empowers and connects.

Water Song

THE Listen, Sister, listen,
MEANING Listen to the waters
calling us like rivers
to run our truest paths to sea -
OF from high hill and lowland valley,
and remote areas of our inner be-ings
In rushing fury, white foamed and swift
at times quietening
THE to hold the colored leaf
Settling in cracks and breaking dams,
tides waxing and waning to answer
WATERS the moon
Blood running
rain falling
tears
dropping
the heart beating upstream
the earth pulling down
rising in vapor
falling
in rain
soaking the roots

birth waters holding the babe,
wetting the canal
signaling the birth
water - the mirror giving us back
to ourselves
our images, our beauty
our strength
bodies and faces double lined
with waves and years

water, you fall - there is poetry
you run, there is music
you rise, there is dance
sweeping, swirling, spinning, running,
settling, rushing,
quieting
rising
misting
fog-thick and ice-formed,
thawing, dripping, enlivening
the dry root
juice of the flower, wine of the fruit,
drop by drop and ocean full
one water around one earth
dashing the shore,
soothing the sand
leaving, returning, together,
apart
distinct
collective

Source of Life,
the great recycler,
carver of rocks, writer of canyons, shaper
of earth

water, you come from the early whispers
of my beginnings
on and on
intimate of every generation and all
to come

the great equalizer
morning tea, evening broth
I know you waters
We've met some time before
Why do I know you so well?
you run ore my body and I am at home
you fall on my naked face and I feel
welcomed
from a long journey
you of a thousand stories, a million
years
spiraling through formless time
you of the endless flow
blood rhythmic, red, mindful
of the moon

o, but waters, I know,
how I know
and will never forget
you are blood spilled
blood of the girl-child terrorized
held to the knife
robbed of her genitals
that she dare not please herself —
blood of the victor's rape
and rape
and rape again
he the returning hero
honored, medaled,
showered with paper
rain —
blood of the backrooms
women anguished, near death,
in a world too moral to share the front

Yes, you are like me waters
time upon time caught, channeled, used,
without rights or consultation,
receptacle
receiver of wastes
assigned to clean the mess
or hide it, or
hold it
exploited, bearer of life they call their own,
confined, owned, fought over,
lost, won
feared, disregarded, unseen,
unheard
motherless

in a world that milks the breast,
shuns the blood and terrorizes
the womb
damming the creative flow for its own sake
while calling itself humane

water, I yearn for you in some place
deeper than hope
surer than faith,
some place I only know must be
the source of love.
I strain my ears to hear you, Beloved Sister,
beloved one of my earth,
you in my veins

As I hear, I shall never lose
your call
from rising cloud to running stream
from feather frost to the deep
and holding sea
I hear you call —
you call to me gently
strongly
clear-depthed, you say
'O, Sister, Beloved One,
 come home
 come
 home'

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Fall 1980

BRINGING OF THE WATERS

A Stream in East Lansing...Linda Pinti

My name is Linda Pinti and I am from Flint, Michigan. Yesterday I was asked to participate in this service by gathering water here in East Lansing and sharing with all of you, the meaning which my water-gathering had for me. So I took my bucket and I went out to the Grand River. As I gathered water I watched the river: moving, flowing, changing. I was reminded of an image in depth-psychology which tells us that each of us, each of our beings is like a well; if you dig down deep enough into the well of our beings you will hit the ground-water that we all share. The ground-water which flows between us and among us, which connects us to each other and to the "All That Is."

For me the gathering of water here this morning is a symbol of the essence and meaning of this convocation. It is a tapping into the collective ground-water that flows among us; the collective energy of the goddess, the liberating, transforming power which is in each of our sisters and in the sister within our brothers.

Rio Grande River in the desert near Albuquerque...Marinel Hartogensis

Mountain Lake in New York State...Edith Fletcher

This water comes from a spring-fed pond on the summit of an 1860 foot hill of the Taconic Range in upstate New York. It is clear and unpolluted by state health department standards.

To me it symbolizes the essence of the place where I find renewal; renewal of my physical well-being, by swimming in it, canoeing, rowing, sailing on it, exploring fish, insect and plant life in it. Renewal of intimacy with my children, grandchildren, and friends who share my love of this place. Renewal of my pleasure and wonder in the natural world of forest and fields. This water symbolizes the sustenance and replenishing of those qualities I find good in myself.

Assiniboine River in Winnipeg, Canada...Jean Bramadet

I bring water from Canada, from the north, from the prairies. This water comes from the Assiniboine River which ultimately flows into Hudson Bay. The water from this river is very important to me because I live on this river (it is almost an extension of my living room) and constantly observe the changes. Sometimes it flows fast and sometimes slowly-quite a bit like my own moods and my own life. I have listened at night to the boom and crack of the ice flows breaking as winter turns into spring. I have watched helplessly as a man drowned in the fast moving waters before me. I have observed with pleasure the blue herons receiving sustenance from its banks. I have enjoyed the river in all its seasons, skating in the winter, canoeing in the summer. But most of all, the river is a symbol of the lasting power of life. The physical part of me may die but, like the river, my spirit will live on.

Rain - from Maryland...Jean Zoerheide

These drops of rain fell in Maryland a few days ago. While I held my pan to catch them, dripping from the roof, I could see rain almost filling a slight depression in the driveway where city starlings come to bathe. Cleansing is the property of rain, not purity.

From what ocean, stream, or field were these molecules drawn upward by the sun? With what other drops did they join to form the cloud that released them to rain upon my state? As I return them to their eternal cycle, I wonder whose distant thirst they will quench in some other land and some other year. Interaction, not purity is the property of rain: cleansing, refreshing, life-giving, transforming rain!

From the Mouth of the Mississippi...Vivian Guild

Atlantic Ocean...Pat Simon

Water, deep source
embracing the earth
rushing, confronting
transforming this shore;

Water, dear source
cradling haven
crystalline beauty
rain on parched land;

Water, sweet sources
linking the eons
stirring our memories
roots for our growth;

Water, warm cauldron
of our revolution
for love of life that
brings a sea-change;

Water, sweet Message
nourish our spirit
christen and bless
the new air we breathe.

Pacific Ocean...Rosemary Matson

I bring this water from the Pacific Ocean, from a white sandy beach in Carmel, California. For me, water has been a sustainer, and a teacher. Whether from a pump in the backyard where we drew our water from a well, a task of mine as the oldest girl in a large family...or our Saturday night baths, when water was heated on the woodstove and poured into a tub on the kitchen floor. The same water bathed us all, my brothers first. I never knew why. ...or my job, as the oldest daughter,

carrying out, emptying and cleaning the potty, the slop-jar, the night urinal, each morning when the cycle of water intake and discharge was completed. I accepted this role, unquestioningly, but grudgingly.

...there was the happy splashing around in the old swimming hole in the gravel pit. Resentful that my brothers could go into the water naked, I and other girls, wore bathing suits....there were angry, frustrating, painful times: when my bully brothers would push my head under the water and I thought I would surely drown. It taught me a fear of water and a hatred of brothers. Surely water was teaching.

This summer, water was teacher again to me, and all those early lessons came into focus. Crossing the Atlantic Ocean in July brought me to the Women's Conference in Copenhagen, in touch with many women who had crossed many different bodies of water to be there too. These women talked about water and their relationship to it.

Around the world, women are the traditional "drawers" and "carriers" of water: for household and animal use, for agriculture, for sanitation. It takes an enormous amount of time, and is a strenuous physical burden. Thirty-two trips a week, 40 in dry season, of 6 kilometers, for fetching water in the Sudan.

Low priority is given to improving village water systems, perhaps because few men carry water the long distance day after day. Women were asking to be included in the decision-making process that sought to reduce the distance and frequency of the collection of water. They know it will bring improved hygiene and better health. They have visions of time and energy for themselves, for socializing, sleeping, resting and caring for their children.

What if some of this same water, from that beach in Carmel, has come from a river in East Africa where women have washed their clothes on a bright sunny day, and found itself, mingled with other waters from other rivers and streams, running down to the sea, and into the ocean, and carried by the tides and waves, connecting me with my sisters, and with all of us everywhere.



When My Sister Calls I Will Answer

When my sister calls I will answer
When my sister calls I will hear
When my sister calls I will answer
When my sister calls I will hear
I'll be somewhere listening for my name

Chorus: I'll be somewhere listening
I'll be somewhere listening
I'll be somewhere listening for my name

I'll be somewhere listening
I'll be somewhere listening
I'll be somewhere listening for my name

When my brother calls I will answer
When my brother calls I will hear
When my brother calls I will answer
When my brother calls I will hear
I'll be somewhere listening for my name

Chorus:

When my neighbor calls I will answer
When my neighbor calls I will hear
When my neighbor calls I will answer
When my neighbor calls I will hear
I'll be somewhere listening for my name

Chorus:

When my earth calls I will answer
When my earth calls I will hear
When my earth calls I will answer
When my earth calls I will hear
I'll be somewhere listening for my name

Chorus:

When my sister calls I will answer
When my sister calls I will hear
When my sister calls I will answer
When my sister calls I will hear
I'll be somewhere listening for my name

Chorus:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Carolyn M. Duke". The signature is written in dark ink and is located at the bottom right of the page.

COMING HOME TO OUR WOMEN'S IDENTITY:

As our ears become attuned to hearing our inner voices, and the voices of one another, so also do we hear the call of our sisters from far beyond. What spirals in also spirals out and beyond space and time. Thus we hear the anguished words and the more anguished silences of women around the earth and through time. We know that our sisterhood extends beyond our land and that we must reach beyond clans and nationalism, beyond languages and cultures, beyond institutions, beyond religions to our sisters -- living hand to living hand, eye to eye, thought to thought, with our compassion for one another, our love of this earth, our very love of life itself creating bonds between us.

We must lift up in our culture women's significant strengths, insights and understanding, our ways of coping and thinking. We must enter now and shape our world toward one of compassion and a new justice that dares to see and to feel and to respond, toward human concern for and affirmation of life, toward joyfulness and celebration, toward relationships of love, respect and mutual concern -- toward cooperation, connectedness and responsiveness.

We bring the inclusiveness of the cycles and the spheres. In our way of understanding life we name a new meaning.

Such a promise demands that we keep our identity as women, we cannot fall back to the false assumptions of the faiths of the past, to the biased assumptions that have failed our half, the female half of the world.

We can no longer embrace the patriarchal assumptions underlying traditional faiths. All religions, including our own liberal faith, keep women invisible, hide our issues, turn our energy and our loyalty toward concerns which, though labelled "human concerns" consistently lift the priorities of males above all else.

No vision, no world view, has the ability to sustain a just and caring society without a feminist perspective -- a perspective that seeks the empowerment of women as well as men. Women must be the ones to promote that perspective for we are the unbounded ones in crucial ways. We have an outsider understanding and we need to draw on that knowledge.

We do not have the investment in the patriarchy that men may have, we do not have the bonds with the power of domination that men have been acculturated to hold and to cherish.

Our's can be an enabling power.

We must come home -- come home to our self-understanding.

Let us embrace our woman-identity!

TAKING THE WATERS FOR:

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

WE TAKE THESE BIRTHING WATERS TO NAME OUR EMPOWERMENT, TO NAME
OUR STRENGTH TO BE OURSELVES AND
TO NAME OUR ABILITY TO RISE UP
AND TO MOVE FORTH

WE TAKE THESE BIRTHING WATERS TO CALL FORTH OUR POWER OF QUESTION-
ING, OUR POWERS TO DOUBT, OUR POWERS
TO EXAMINE EVERY DEFINITION AND
EVERY AUTHORITY OUTSIDE OURSELVES

WE TAKE THESE AMNIOTIC WATERS TO NAME OUR IMAGINATION AND CREATI-
VITY, OUR POWER TO UNVEIL OUR
THINKING AND TO CREATE NEW VISIONS

WE TAKE THESE WATERS, SYMBOLIC OF OUR BECOMING, TO NAME THE RE-
CLAMATION OF OUR ENERGY AND LOYALTY,
TO SIGNIFY THAT WE PUT OURSELVES--
THE THOUGHTS OF OUR MINDS AND THE
WORK OF OUR HANDS TO WHAT WE MOST
DEEPLY VALUE

WE TAKE THESE WATERS, SYMBOLIC OF A NEW GENESIS, TO NAME OUR
LOVE, OF THIS EARTH, OUR CONNECTEDNESS
WITH PEOPLE EVERYWHERE AND OUR DEVOTION
TO LIFE ITSELF.

SHARING OF THE WATERS

These five women have taken of the waters in a symbolic way for all of us. Yet we recognize that there are those here who wish to share in other ways.

We must have our own reminders that we have put aside those symbols of exclusion and of domination--those symbols that have diminished us and now lead to the destruction of the planet. We must lift up life giving symbols and keep them before us: symbols of our woman's identity--of our empowerment, our questioning, our imagination and creativity, our energy and loyalty, our nurturing and our love.

The waters will remain here. If you wish to take some home, find a way to do so. Look among the items you brought--the lotions, the creams, the perfumes. Those containers carry the veils we wear--the reminders of our inadequacies. Empty one of those containers. Take with you this symbol of our becoming. Take some of the birthing waters.

There will be no keeper of the waters. You may find a time, have a private or a shared ritual. Remember only, there are many of us.

Coming Home

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Words + music by Carolyn McDate

We're coming home to the spirit in our soul — We're coming home and the
healing makes us whole — Like riv-ers running to the sea — We're coming
home, we're coming home — As the day is wo-ven into night,
— As the dark-ness lives within the light — As we o-pen
vi-sion to new sight — We're coming home, we're coming home —

Bearing words born new unto each day
Speaking bold where only silence lay
as we dare to rise and lead the way

As the full moon waxes into wane
Changing, yielding all that she did gain
as from death she dares be born again

To reclaim the thinking of our mind
Leaving shackles lying far behind
bearing hope for every soul confined

To create a world of joy and peace
Where the power of justice does release
love abounding, wars forever cease