

## **Easter, Earth Day and Stewardship Sunday – What a Perfect Mix!**

*By Norma Bailey, April 21, 2019*

A perfect mix! At least, that's what it sounded like to me when I had to come up with a title for the service a few weeks ago. It shouldn't be hard to come up with a reflection that combines all three elements. But it was until I harkened back to a dictionary and my eighth grade-science class.

Dictionary: A mixture is a combination of different qualities, things, or emotions in which the component elements are individually distinct.

Eighth grade science class: A mixture is a substance made by combining two or more different materials in such a way that no chemical reaction occurs. A mixture can usually be separated back into its original components.

So...I will briefly speak to the three separate elements, now knowing that I don't have to find the perfect explanation of the connection, just one that makes some sense!

Easter. As we rejoice in the renewal found in the natural world in the spring, Pagans and Christians alike are rejoicing in the rebirth of the sun/son and the prolific renewal of life often represented by chicks and bunnies as winter's dormancy gives way to the buds and blooms of new life. As the Pagans among us are celebrating Eostara, honoring the ancient European goddess of spring, the Christians are celebrating Easter today. Celebrating with bunnies and eggs dates back to ancient pagan festivals celebrating the fertility and renewal of new life common in the spring. Christians celebrate Easter as the time when Jesus was crucified on the cross by the Romans and came back to life three days later. Many Unitarian Christians believe that Jesus was a great teacher and healer. While they may not believe the story of the resurrection literally, it is still a story that often invokes hope, forgiveness and the renewal of new life.

Earth Day. On January 28, 1969, a well drilled by Union Oil Platform A off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, blew out. More than three million gallons of oil spewed, killing over 10,000 seabirds, dolphins, seals, and sea lions. As a reaction to this disaster, activists were mobilized to create environmental regulation, environmental education, and Earth Day. The first Earth Day celebrations took place in two thousand colleges and universities, roughly ten thousand primary and secondary schools, and hundreds of communities across the United States. More importantly, it "brought 20 million Americans out into the spring sunshine for peaceful demonstrations in favor of environmental reform." It now is observed in 193 countries on April 22, and coordinated by the nonprofit Earth Day Network, chaired by the first Earth Day 1970 organizer Denis Hayes, according to whom Earth Day is now "the largest secular holiday in the world, celebrated by more than a billion people every year." Environmental groups have sought to make Earth Day into a day of action to change human behavior and provoke policy changes.

Unitarian Universalism's seventh principle: "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part" makes this a day to celebrate religiously as a reminder of the role we have to protect our planet.

Stewardship Sunday. As defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, stewardship is the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. We, all of us, are the stewards of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Central Michigan – UUFCM. As stewards, we show that we care about the UUFCM because of what it has meant for ourselves and our loved ones and what it can mean for future generations and for the wider world. We take responsibility for fairly compensating our church staff, maintaining our facility, operating our programs, and sustaining our commitment to the greater UU movement. While stewardship certainly has a strong financial component, giving of our treasure, it also includes our commitment to giving of our time and talents. This is why, on this Stewardship Sunday, we ask for your treasure – your financial commitment to the Fellowship - but also your time and your talents which you indicate by filling out the Volunteer Opportunities sheet.

So...have I found a connection, at least one that makes sense to me, I think. Easter, whether celebrated by Pagans or Christians or with chicks and bunnies, offers hope and a sense of renewal of life, always celebrated in the spring when, clearly, life is renewed, a season that we all look forward to after the long darkness of winter. Earth Day, also celebrated in the spring, is an opportunity to remind ourselves of the awe and wonder we feel when we consider this beautiful planet, our home, and, as well, the responsibility we have to protect it for ourselves, for our children, and for our future. Stewardship Sunday, also celebrated in the spring, gives us the chance to be reminded of, and respond to, our gratefulness for this place and our shared roles as stewards of our present and of our future.

The connection. Certainly, the spring, being a bit facetious on my part. But more importantly, what strikes me is the word gratitude – gratitude I feel that spring has arrived in all its wonder, gratitude for this glorious earth that I have the privilege to live upon, and gratitude for the existence of this Fellowship that gives me so much. I don't know if this works for you, but it works for me. Or... maybe I should just leave it to the Mystery!