

Mother's Day service, May 8, 2011.

Jennifer Elliott's Call to Worship:

The sleepless nights

The morning giggles

Counting to 10 to keep from losing it

The excited wiggles

Pacing the floors with a crying child

Tiny kisses on your cheek

Cursing the teeth that just won't come through

Hearing the first words they speak

Forever answering "Why?"

Hoping that it will be you they always come to

The eye rolling and silent treatment

Hearing "I love you"

Whether you are called Mother, Mommy, Momma, Mummy, Mahair, Madre, Mere, Mutter, Mam, Step-Mom, even Aunt or Grandmother, biological or mother of the heart, you know these joys of motherhood. Even in the most trying times you are grateful just to have your children and you wouldn't change them. The road of motherhood isn't paved just in smiles and coos. There are a few bumps along the way, sick days, yelling fights, that instant that they wander out of your sight for just one second. But at the end of the sick day, when they come to you and just want a hug, when you turn the corner and there they are, you know that it was all worth it. And then there are the wonderful moments your heart can't help but to smile. When you hear them giggle, when they remind you how magical life is, when something as simple as a swing is the highlight of their day, when they put their arms around you and you know that you would do anything for them. They say childhood is about laughter, love, hide-and-seek, growing pains, discovery, and learning. Motherhood is about love, joy, and discovery. We rediscover how to be a child, we rediscover our hearts, we discover that we are strong, we discover that we are weak, and we discover that joy can be found in many forms. Come let us worship together.

Mother's Day Homily #1: *A grandmother is a mother who has a second chance*, by Diantha Horton

Twenty-seven years ago, I picked up the phone at our home in western New York and heard our son-in-law's deep and quiet voice say, "Carrie had a boy a few minutes ago. They're both doing great." We talked a few minutes more, before I had to get to an appointment in the village, where I wandered around in a state of awe.

This was momentous for us, and I thought, "Stop, world! Take a minute. Pay attention. Our first grandchild's just been born." We Unitarian Universalists often say, at Christmas Eve services, that any night a child is born is a holy night, and this was an astounding day to us. The next generation was here, the wheel of life had turned over once again, there was a new face on the planet that was part of us, and all this was mysteriously meaningful.

Two years later, the next phone call, and a brother named Paul, whom we saw within hours, Mark observing with curiosity and amazement this squirming creature he'd been hearing about for months.

For the next four grandchildren, who are adopted, there were days or weeks before we knew whether they'd be coming home to our daughter and son-in-law's house in upstate New York. Once, the difficult anxiety stretched into years before the adoption was final, and the child was old enough that the judge let her sit in the big swivel chair and bang the gavel to seal the deal. When Laurie called minutes afterwards, we both wept with joy and relief.

I love being a grandmother, just as I loved being a mother, and I've revisited some of the same ups and downs that I experienced with my own three children. Motherhood has its seasons of delight and of trials. Frankly, I preferred being a mom to babies, toddlers, and elementary school-age children than to teens. I guess many of you out there understand that. Little children depend on you, worship you, and think you're perfect. Teens see right through you, they are trying to establish their own strengths and space and they're...well, it's a rougher ride for both parent and child.

I love the quirky, open mind of the young child exploring the world and trying to figure it all out. I delighted in the thoughtful observation of one of our daughters who remarked of a neighbor, "They must be rich. They have furniture that...matches." Children see the world in their own fresh way, and it's wonderful to hear them making sage observations day after day.

I resonate to the quote, "A grandmother is a mother who has a second chance." It's been a great experience to relive all the pains and triumphs, to enjoy the naïve and unvarnished way children see the world, and a delight to see them launched in the world and learning new skills.

It's also humbling to see what I've learned now that I wish I'd practiced earlier: listening more fully and deeply, not sweating the small stuff, and recognizing more precisely what the small stuff is.

I've gained new respect for the dailyness of the job of motherhood, and the amount of energy it takes. I've seen our daughter in upstate New York do a tremendous job of navigating her family's way through some of their four children's crises, and I salute her for her steadfast devotion, and the way she uses her considerable intelligence and compassion to help them find the best solution for their challenges. She's a gem, and I admire her tremendously.

Young children ask an enormous amount of questions, and I'm stunned by the amount of patience it takes to answer them. I know I did it, but I'd forgotten that the questions often begin before breakfast and just subside...with...sleep.

Being a grandmother has been, for me, a terrific trip, and I've enjoyed revisiting parenthood through this wonderful second chance. And I honor all the moms out there whose energy, persistence, patience, and faithfulness we celebrate today.

Mother's Day Homily #2: Mom, by Bruce Langston

On October 23, 1926, Henry "Harry" Oxley and Friedricka Schiller Oxley, had my mom and named her Elizabeth Louise, in Jersey City, NJ,.

She and my dad met when they were 18 and 17, respectively, working at an airplane engine remanufacturing facility in Rome, NY, during WWII.

They soon married and, in eight years, bore six daughters, Barbara, Bonnie, Beth, Bryan, who lives in Ball Ground, Blake and Brett. By 1966, they had five more children: two boys, Jimmy, and your humble fellow congregant, then our sister, Bernadette, who lives in Northeast Atlanta, our brother, Bobby Joe, and finally, baby sister, Brooke.

We lived in Hunterdon County, in the dairy country of the Garden State, in the same house for my first fifteen years. That house, in the small county town of Norton, population 100, sat on a hill that sloped down to the west through a cow pasture, to a pond and brook.

That bucolic setting provided the natural classroom where my mom taught us and we taught each other about the beauty of the interconnected web of which we are all a part. We learned the names of the birds, the bees, the flowers and the trees. We built dams in the brook using rocks under which we found crayfish. We learned about the stars in the night sky and how the ancients grouped them together as constellations.

We picked wild cherries in the spring and cultivated and wild strawberries, blackberries, red-caps, black caps and raspberries in the summer, all of which we all learned from Mom, could be eaten fresh-picked, in breakfast cereal, baked in pies and preserved. We learned similarly about tomatoes, peaches and other fruits and veggies. Our cellar was always stocked with pints and quarts of tomatoes, pickles, apple sauce and various jams, jellies and preserves.

Mom taught us to recycle, *back in the sixties*, when we took our cans, bottles and newspapers to the recycling center six or seven miles from home. We turned off lights and other energy users, when not in use, not just to save money but to not waste.

Our mom taught us about the inherent dignity and worth of all people. In the kinder, gentler, less-worrisome 60s and 70s, she picked up hitchhikers on country roads, if she could find a way to squeeze them into a Volkswagen bus or Plymouth or Chevy station wagon before we had or wore seat belts.

Mom worked as a waitress at upper middle class steak houses, Friday and Saturday nights, when the babies could be home with their pre-adolescent older sisters who grew up fast, and, later, lunches when we were all school-age.

We all cleaned our rooms every Saturday, took turns vacuuming and sweeping, helping with dinner, washing dishes, folding laundry and mowing the lawn. These experiences, I realize now, helped me learn about the right of conscience and the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;

On several occasions during my childhood, I remember having strangers down-on-their-luck types, in our home for Sunday dinner or a weeknight supper, experiences that taught us compassion and the worth and dignity of all people.

After our oldest two or three sisters had moved from home, a young man, still in his teens, an immigrant from Germany working as a busboy at one of the restaurants with Mom, due to details I don't remember, needed a place to sleep for awhile. Mom somehow found a bed for young Klaus in our humble home.

Mom also found the time to go to community college and earned an AA degree in education, then worked at Head Start for a few years.

When I was fifteen, Mom, Dad and the youngest four kids moved to Fort Myers, Florida. After a couple years, Mom, a woman of seemingly unlimited love, patience and understanding, brought foster children into our home, at least ten in all, for various durations and in various combinations, throughout the late 70s and 80s.

With her children moved from home, Mom fills her days, variously, volunteering as a cuddler in the maternity ward of a hospital near home; baking cookies on Thursdays at the Ronald McDonald house for families of children in the hospital; has planted and maintained a butterfly garden at an Audubon sanctuary and works in her own gardens at home nearly every day. She is great-grandmother to 14, grandmother to 21 and mother of 11 and countless others.

Mom and Dad, married almost 65 years, now, still live together in remarkable peace and harmony, in Fort Myers.

As I generally do on Sunday evenings, I called Mom and Dad on Easter. Mom told me about her Saturday: she'd had two of her great-grandsons over the day. They dyed Easter eggs, baked something delicious, and painted an Easter egg "tree" white (uh... ask me later). I thought to myself, "All is good in the world."

Despite my suspicions that Mom, who goes to Mass every Sunday (or Saturday night), is worried about the uncertainty, at best, of my afterlife, I know that much of what she taught me helped me move beyond the narrow confines of Catholicism and find my own spiritual/religious/philosophical path. For that and everything else, I can't imagine a better mother.

Mother's Day Homily #3: *Raising Kids At UUMAN*, by Mary Danielak

My husband, Mike, and I became UU when we were engaged and married in the Unitarian Church in Rockford, IL. When we found the UU church we were not only impressed that the principles matched our beliefs, but that RE was congruent with our values; and someday when we had kids we would want them to learn these principles. When I became pregnant with twins through the magic of IVF we were thrilled after 4 years of trying. Then I discovered that I was pregnant again when the twins were 9 months old **BUT** we were the only ones in the room that time! I got many second looks as I pushed 14 month old twins in the stroller and I was bulging with another. But when I actually had 17 month old twins and a new-born; that is when I felt overwhelmed. We were outnumbered. But we rose to the challenge, abandoning our former selves, our hobbies, our sleep, and our spare time. There were many things I pondered about in handling this new brood of little beings in my care.

When they were young, we barely made it to church. The boys disliked RE, said it was boring, and only wanted to run around on the playground outside. So on the weeks I had enough sleep, felt not quite so frayed, and could convince my husband, we would drag them into UU. At one of the services I heard Kirk and Margo Bogue's girls talk at a Youth service. Another time, I heard some teens read their faith statements after the Coming of Age program. These kids were so well spoken, had fabulous values, and were worldly. **UGH**, my kids were lost; there was no way I could get to UU enough to have this transformation happen to my children. The parents of those children must be exceptional parents; it was intimidating. But we continued on with treating our children with respect, talking about our values, the principles, tolerance, **and** science to our children.

Even though we were liberals, and did not want to force 'religion' down our children's throats, when the time came for Our Whole Lives, in the 4th and 5th grades, the Coming of Age in the 7th and 8th grades, then OWL again in high school; there was no choice in our house. Coming of Age is program about faith, beliefs, and other religions that culminated in the children forming their own faith statement. Our Whole Lives is a sexuality program designed for different stages of children lives to inform them fully about their sexuality. **Sure**, I could talk to my kids about sex at least once, but here was a program designed by experts for different age groups and to help us talk to our kids for almost 9 months about important topics ,as they grew into sexual human being. Thanks to Owl we did not have to worry how we were going to broach these topics.

There were various times that they whined during these times that they **HAD** to go to church, pleaded with us that they were not learning ANYTHING, and complained about the RE teachers. However, **through** this they connected to a strong, but vibrant, brilliant, and liberal group of like-minded teens at UUMAN, that you would all be proud of.

When my son, Zack, came to realize he was gay at age 16 it was a non-event at our house. After talking with both Mike and I, he then told his brothers. One brother said, "That makes sense, cool;" the other brother said "Congratulations". By then they had heard their whole lives that this was normal. We had to take the **unusual** position of warning Zack that the world was not as accepting as UUMAN and his family. When he was invited to prom by a very handsome tall guy, we were all there to take pictures, watch them pin on their flowers and drive off in the limo. This is as normal as my other two boys going to prom.

How many of you came to the Youth Service about one month ago? **Pause and look around**. If you did, you saw all three of my kids talk; Nick, Matt and Zack. They did not tell us about any of this before we arrived; we were as surprised as you. I had so many of you come up to me and congratulate me; tell me how amazing they were; asked me how we did it. My Answer was we were "good enough" parents and that I really didn't know. But I do know that through our persistence **yet variable attendance at RE**, they too turned into one of those eloquent, worldly, liberal and tolerant youth. We have had no family here in GA, but we have had the principles of UUMAN to help shape and mold our children into the amazing people that we all heard several weeks ago.

And for that I want to say Thank You.