Order of Service

Astoria Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Gathering Bell (Tibetan singing bowl)

Welcome and announcements

Board member

Prelude: “Breaths” by Ysaye Barnwell (Hymn # 1001 Singing the Journey) Performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock (on computer)

Call to Celebration: Amy Beltaine

We are a circle, within a circle. With no beginning and never ending.

ASL: We Circle Within Circle. Without Beginning. Without End.

(Within-gather into other hand. Without-with+open apart. Begin-key in ignition. End-cutoff)

Chalice Lighting: (Please join in saying)

We are between the worlds, Beyond the bounds of space and time
Where night and day, birth and death, joy and sorrow
Meet as one.

Hymn: (Please join in singing)

It’s the blood of the ancients
that runs through our veins
and the forms pass
but the circle of life remains

Joys and Sorrows

Worship Associate

Time for all ages: “Beto and the Bone Dance” by Gina Freschet

Hymn:

“Turn the World Around” by Harry Belafonte (Hymn #1074 in Singing the Journey)

Sharing what has been evoked within us – Members of the congregation are invited to share their feelings and thoughts. Please hold questions for the coffee hour. Amy would be more than happy to engage in discussion after the service. This is a time for sharing from the heart.

Benediction: By Leigh Anne Hussey

Welcome Winter, waning season,
Now with night the new year comes.
All who honor elder kinsfolk,
Dance the dead to earthly drums.
Souls respected, safeguard living,
House we’ll hold and hallow hearth.
Blessings be on those who bide here,
Blessings be on those who bide here,
And indeed on all the earth!

Extinguishing the Chalice: (Please join in saying)
The circle is open
Yet unbroken
May the peace and love be ever in our hearts
Merry meet, merry part and
Merry meet again.

Closing Hymn: Let there be peace on Earth

Homily

We are a circle within a circle.

When pagans gather as a community for worship, they are usually seated or standing in a circle. Sometimes the idea of a circle is made even stronger. We are asked to visualize blue rings of power surrounding the company so that we all are within a protected sphere. This sacred space, this space between the worlds, makes us free. The community can then connect with one another. We are in the place of no-boundary, where all are a part of the circle of life, the cycle of life, and all are one.

This time of year is a time when we are seeing the dying leaves and the remains of the harvests. As we drove here this morning the fields full of stubble had a frosting of snow. The cold and more snow are coming and thoughts turn inward. Traditionally this is the time when the veil between the worlds is thin. Now is the time when those who have gone before will visit us. In Celtic lands an ancestor feast may be held, a place set at the table for those dearly departed who wish to be present.

As Beto discovered, those dearly departed are always present. If we want them to be. They are in our hearts and minds. The blood of the ancients flows through our veins. Our circle of life is within the circle of history. Written, and unwritten history, form us and we form history.

My ancestor altar includes photos of people who are important to me who I can no longer call on the phone. Now I dial them up on the spirit-phone. Tap into their gifts and advice and memory.

One tradition used by some pagans on Hallowe’en is a gatekeeping ritual. As you arrive at the ceremony, you are stopped at the entrance, and you are asked “Whose are you” Your name is not sufficient! Some thought is necessary. One year I might answer “I am Amy, daughter of Anne, daughter of Laura, daughter of Mabel…”

Laura, my grandmother, was not my favorite person. We differed on so many things. She voted Republican and the only black person she knew personally was her housekeeper. Her ideas about what a proper lady should
do caused her to give up her career and spend her restless mind and energy on the D.A.R., the garden club, and charity work. My liberal, feminist viewpoint saw only her pettiness, her bitterness, her narrow-minded bigotry. I was highly offended when family and friends commented on how alike we were.

Yep. We were really, very, very alike. How could two such different people be so alike? No, I haven’t suddenly started voting Republican. But I admit: I’m tenacious. I’m a collector of trivia. I’m impatient. And I really appreciate the etiquette writer “Miss Manners.”

So, now, when I need a boost to keep working toward equal access to civil marriage for all who wish to create loving families, I can light a candle on my altar, in memory of Grandma, and draw on the same energy she used to get a hospital wing built in a small mill town in upstate New York.

I am the child of these ancestors.

The blood of the ancients flows through our veins.

Who are your ancestors?

Some folks choose other ancestors. They widen the circle. Who are my ancestors? Who do I choose to be?

The gatekeeper asks “Who are you?” and I reply, I am Amy, child of Susan Griffin, child of Emma Goldman, child of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Susan Griffin, Feminist, Lesbian, writer of poetry, living with chronic pain. Emma Goldman, activist, anarchist, who said “If I can’t dance, I don’t want to be at your revolution.” And Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a Unitarian who questioned the role of women, and envisioned something different.

Who are your chosen ancestors and what do you learn from them?

The vision of the ancients is our vision too.

The circle widens and we may search for our tribe, our people, our spiritual ancestors.

The gatekeeper asks “Who are you?” and I reply, I am Amy, child of the witches of Europe, child of the Christians whose views were declared heretical at the council of Nicea, child of Esther.
The witches: healers, earth worshipers, local counselors. The witches: anyone who didn’t agree with the official church rules. The witches, anyone who didn’t agree with the official local government, anyone who didn’t fit in. The first Christian Heretics: the Gnostics and those who agreed with Arius who didn’t believe in a trinity. And Esther, who cleverly saved her people from genocide, against impossible odds.

The heritage of heretics. This is a heritage that Pagans and Unitarians and Universalists share. The child of heretics must honor that heritage by defending religious tolerance. The child of a people who were put to death because of who they were must honor that heritage by respecting the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Who do you choose as your ancestors? What do you draw from them?

The spirit of the ancestors is our spirit.

The circle widens and we name our stories.

The gatekeeper asks “Who are you?” and perhaps this time I reply, I am Amy, child of Xena, Warrior Princess, child of Lilith, child of Innana!

Ever since I discovered the television show featuring a warrior woman named Xena, I’ve always wanted a W.W.X.D.? bracelet. You know. What Would Xena Do? And I’ve had a special place in my heart for the first woman, the one who came before that daddy’s girl named Eve. Lilith who thought for herself and became a patron saint for independent women. And hey, who wouldn’t want to be the child of Inanna? Babylonian Creator Goddess. The Queen of Heaven and Earth and the source of music, and the source of sexual ecstasy.

Our myths and our stories help to create us and inspire us. Whether we are reading the old and drawing new meaning, or writing new, every story we tell makes us who we are. Do you have a story that shows you someone you would like to be? Do you have a story of divinity?

What myths and stories are your myths and stories?

The stories of the ancestors are our stories.

The circle widens and who I am has no boundaries.

The gatekeeper asks “Who are you?” and now I reply,
I am the child of the fertile Oregon valleys and the exquisite Ithaca waterfalls, I am the child of the earth and the sun and the moon, I am a child of the universe.

We owe it to our selves to honor the interdependent web of life of which we are a part. We are formed by place and our world gives everything to us.

As one Native American chant goes: We are all one with the infinite sun.

What are you a part of? What defines your self?

We are the children of stardust and the children of place. The blood of the ancestors runs through our veins.

One thing that being a Pagan has taught me is that I am a child, always. I am being born each moment. Every day I learn something new. That child-like joy and awe of all is a gift that keeps me open to learning and growing.

Hallowe’en is at the time of year when we look at nature dying, going into hibernation. It is a time of year when our thoughts turn to those who are no longer with us. A time when the past seems closer and the future uncertain.

We are a circle, within a circle. With no beginning and never ending. Always being reborn, always widening the circle.

This is a time to turn to our ancestors, ancestors of blood, of will, of spirit, of story, and of place, and prepare to be reborn.