

Congregation Says Goodbye to Beloved Leader **The Rev. Allen Wells leaves Unitarian Society in Pomona**

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POMONA, NY — Flowers, with their unique beauty, are like people, the Rev. Allen Wells told the congregation during his final sermon at the First Unitarian Society of Rockland County yesterday morning.

"Just as no two flowers are alike, we are all special, and yet, we are all connected as we strive to make our world a better place," said Wells, who is leaving his position as the society's part-time minister after four years.

With an assortment of vividly colored flowers in hand, members gathered to celebrate their annual service of Flower Communion and to commemorate their beloved minister.

"He has really been a source of inspiration for us all," said Liz Carl of New City, a congregant for 13 years and member of the society's board of worship. "He is the most kind and gentle person and has taught us so much in the past four years. We're very sad to see him leave."

During the ceremony, Wells discussed the purpose and origins of the Flower Communion, which is observed annually by Unitarian Universalist congregations throughout the world on the last Sunday of the congregational year.

Began in 1923 by Nobeit Capek, the founder of the Unitarian church in Czechoslovakia, the custom honors both people's individuality and their unity.

At the beginning of the service, members placed flowers they had brought into one of three vases. Later, each congregant chose a different blossom from the containers.

"We each bring our own uniqueness and we also take and learn from each other," Wells said.

The ceremony also commemorates the egalitarian philosophy of Capek, who was killed in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II.

Capek's life inspires others to "stand up to oppression, give to the needy, be brave in difficult times and celebrate the joy of living," said Wells, who holds degrees in religion and psychology from the University of Chicago.

Many congregants also spoke during the service to thank and praise the minister, who will continue his psychotherapy and counseling practice in New Jersey after he leaves his ministry.

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"You have revitalized us and allowed us to grow," said Tracy Hancock of Pearl River. "We love you and wish you well always," said Hancock, who was married to her husband, Bill, by Wells in 2005.

Before Wells arrived, the society, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary, ran without a minister for years.

He will be replaced by the Rev. Harry Green of Ridgewood, N.J., who is leaving his position as the Metro District congregational services consultant at the end of the month.

"You have touched me and changed my life as I've experienced the individuality and energy that's alive in this congregation," Wells said before all members joined hands for a moment of silence to conclude the service.

Carolyn Ray of New City, a member for 15 years, attended the morning service with her daughter, Tova Holmes, 17, a junior at Clarkstown North High School.

"He has been an enormous asset to this community," said Ray, whose daughter is a member of the society's youth group, which focuses on promoting social justice. "His services have been filled with a real sense of peace and hope. He embodies acceptance, which is what Unitarianism is all about."