

Ritual evolves over time but remains the heart of Alpha

BY MARIANNE BUSCH
BULLOCK, BΘ

Ritual Revision Project Team Leader

Alpha Sigma Alpha's ritual is the basis of our sisterhood and provides the source for our core purpose and values. The Ritual is the heart of everything we stand for and binds AΣA members together throughout time and over any distance. It is impossible to discuss AΣA history without understanding our ritual and impossible to fully appreciate the ritual without understanding its history.

When our Founders started the sorority, they established practices that we follow to this day, but our ritual is not static and many members (and non-members) have played a role in its development.

Judge George Hundley, father of Founder Juliette Hundley, assisted the founders in developing the original material.

The sorority song chosen was "Blest Be the Tie That Binds." The

sorority flower was originally the white carnation (changed to the American beauty rose in 1909). Early symbolism included Athene, who is known as the Goddess of Wisdom and the Virgin Goddess of War. Attended by an owl, Athene wears the Aegis, Zeus' protective shield (the Aegis became the fledgling sorority's first publication). For a group of strong, young women who recognized the privilege of attending college when education was inaccessible to millions, Athene was a fitting patroness for the new literary sorority.

While the pearl was a jewel chosen by the Founders, they also chose the emerald. The ruby replaced the emerald at the 1909 convention to harmonize with the sorority colors.

Initiation underwent some changes in the early years — *The History of Alpha Sigma Alpha* mentions that "unexpected incidents" sometimes happened even when great efforts were made to make the events inspiring. One can imagine the changes made to ensure the safety of members after Marguerite Palmer, A, accidentally ran into the library ladder while blindfolded resulting in a black eye!

1914 a major revision was made to the ritual with AΣA's reorganization. A more elaborate ritual was adopted and anyone not initiated under this ritual (including the Founders) had their names stricken from the records of the sorority at the hand of Ida Shaw Martin. The *Phoenix* was developed as the new sorority magazine but was also included as a major part of the ritual as symbolic of rebirth. New sorority flowers were chosen, the daffodil and chrysanthemum.

In 1915 King Asa made his first appearance and was adopted as an exemplar. The Phoenix recognition pin was introduced and designed to be "given in any situation where the recipient is to be honored or recognized." The sorority flowers were changed to narcissus and aster to better fit the ritual, which continued to be enhanced by Martin.

Martin brought about several significant changes in 1918 including the Initiation of mothers (the forerunner of alumnae initiation), development of the Mother Patroness Degree and the pledge pin we use today. In 1919 the crown pin was introduced as an honor accorded to a mother, advisor or sponsor who has given time and support to the sorority.

As AΣA history buffs know, the 1930 Boston convention brought about the removal of Martin as national president and ushered in a new era for the sorority under the leadership of Wilma Wilson Sharp, ZZ.

Sigma Alpha

While Ida Shaw Martin had truly saved AΣA from an almost certain demise and brought about the sorority's greatest expansion, her leadership had resulted in issues related to serious financial and operational questions and concerns of conflict of interest between the sorority's interests and her business interests (Note: for a better understanding of this period, consult *The History of Alpha Sigma Alpha*).

Wilma and her national council undertook a major revision of the ritual during the 1930s, along with restoring the memberships of early members, including the Founders, who had been initiated

under the original ritual. The Ribbon Pledge, and Phoenix Degree were combined into one pledging service and installation of officers was standardized. The first bound ritual book appeared in 1933 and was a step forward in standardizing the ritual. The memorial service used at convention in 1936 was adopted a national ritual.

Since that time several revisions have been made. The 1964 convention showcased seven revised services; two revisions in the

1990s produced more inclusive and updated language and terminology.

In early 2006, national council authorized a new ritual revision project. Members of the team are Marianne Busch Bullock, BΘ, Tanya Trumbla Brewer, ΔY, and Jill Whittenburg, BΓ. The team was told that national council was not looking at making philosophical changes to our ritual, but that the update would essentially make sure that the language and terminology used in the ritual corresponds to our current practices.

The team also was charged with adding meaningful ceremonies or services to the ritual especially for alumnae members and to celebrate chapter and membership milestones. The team clarified a number of areas that have created confusion for chapters, including clarifications on processes and procedures that might help chapters conduct ritual

ceremonies in a more meaningful, respectful manner, appropriate dress and conduct. An important aspect to the team was publishing the complete ritual in one publication, including as previously, alumnae services which had

previously not been included.

Based on observations from then Leadership Consultant Naydia Spears, ZΩ, the team discussed incorporating ritual into daily chapter life. The team determined that a separate group should be appointed to study how to relate the ritual to every position in the chapter and develop programming to assist chapters to lead with love, help members focus on ritual and help them learn more about ritual so they can learn how to live the ritual and incorporate ritual into their daily lives.

After numerous email exchanges and several working conference calls, the team completed its work by June 2006. Marianne and Tanya presented a convention workshop based on the team's work, "Ritual Done Right." National council reviewed the team's work and made final changes to the ritual before having the publication printed and distributed to chapters in 2007. In addition a national ritual coaching team was appointed.

Through the years many have played a role in the development of our ritual, but throughout its pages the overriding sentiment remains—love. Love never ends, and throughout the evolution of our ritual it remains the heart of AΣA.