



Elderberries

Unitarian
Universalist
Retired Ministers
and Partners
Association

Volume 41 Number 1

Winter 2025

www.uurmapa.org

Spring Conference

Called to Connect in the Midst of Change

It is easy to lose your way in the chaos of personal or cultural change. During such a time it is natural that we would seek to strengthen our connection to others in order to stabilize our relationships and our grounding. To help us in that endeavor, the conference planning team is pleased to announce the theme of our spring conference: *Called to Connect in the Midst of Change*. The conference opens Monday, April 21, and closes the following Wednesday.



Karen Hering

Our theme will be presented by Karen Hering, author of the book *Trusting Change: Finding Our Way through Personal and Global Transformation*. Karen is a UU minister and author. She led a literary ministry for 15 years and has also served as a congregational minister, a chaplain and a threshold guide to people and communities on the cusp of change. She is the author of *Writing to Wake the Soul: Opening the Sacred Conversation Within*. Both of her books have been honored with the [Silver Nautilus Award](#). She is the creator of *Threshold Times*, an online community found at karenhering.substack.com.

She will make her presentation during the Tuesday morning session. No advance reading or preparation needed, but UURMaPA members who wish to purchase Hering's book, *Trusting Change*, will enjoy a discount at inSpirit [\[uuabookstore.org\]](http://uuabookstore.org) when using the code HERING.

Karen is looking forward to joining us, and she encourages us to embrace change by making good connections. She said, "Whether in personal transitions or on the shifting terrain of our shared world, we are all called to participate in change by connecting more deeply — to one another, to our bodies and the wisdom they carry, and to the world around us. With poetry and powerful questions, personal reflection, embodied practices and conversation, in this year's theme session, we'll consider the dynamics of change and how it becomes more trustworthy when we engage it more fully."

Continued on page 2

Called to Connect, continued

We will also enjoy a concert on the opening day of the conference with [Melanie DeMore](#), who has a remarkable voice, weaving the fibers of African American folk music with soulful ballads, spirituals and her own original music. DeMore artfully brings her audience together through her music and commentary. She has toured extensively, singing at festivals, universities, in coffee houses and concert halls. Her recordings *Share My Song* and *Come Follow Me* are heartfelt collections of her music.



In addition to her solo work, DeMore facilitates vocal workshops for professional and community-based choral groups and has taught her program called “Sound Awareness” in schools, prisons and youth organizations in the U.S., Canada, Cuba and New Zealand.

DeMore traces her musical interest to her parents, who started a Black theater group in Alaska in the 1960s. She majored in music at Incarnate Word University in San Antonio, Texas, and later worked as a studio musician, belonged to a melodrama company and sang in Scintilla, a Black women’s a cappella group. She also sang for commercials and wrote music for the theater.

DeMore describes her music as “in the African-American folk tradition of Odetta” and notes, “I have a very, very, very low voice.” She has shared the stage with numerous artists including Buffy Saint Marie, John Prine, Josh White, Jr., Laura Nyro, Sweet Honey in the Rock and Pete Seeger.

“Melanie is known to the mothers of screaming babies as a human pacifier,” writes the website [Because of a Song](#), curated by fellow lesbian folk artist Holly Near. “She is known to the parents of challenged children as the child whisperer as she transforms the raw energy of human beings into flowing rhythms, self empowering awareness, with a sweet top note of humor and not taking oneself too seriously.

“An admitted kid at heart, Melanie loves to inject her effervescent playfulness into traditionally serious forums and gatherings, reminding us to lighten up, step out the way and let our spirits do their dance.”

In her own words: “A song can hold you up when there’s no ground beneath you.”

Other features of this conference will be Odysseys with Scotty McLennan and Phyllis Morales, Wayne Walder leading a session on telling and hearing stories (see page 8) and a service of remembrance honoring those we’ve lost. We’ll also have the chance to meet our colleagues in Connecting Rooms and worship services.

Greetings from the Elderberries editor

George Buchanan here. I'm the editor for Elderberries. If you have story suggestions or ideas for improving Elderberries, contact me at elderberries@uurmapa.org

I deeply appreciate the information provided by so many of you and the copy-editing and layout contributions of my spouse Carrie Buchanan. Thanks also to Ann Marie Alderman for curating our directory.

All outdoor photos are from the Eastern Ontario town where I live, unless noted otherwise.

Called to Connect, continued

For more information about the conference, please watch for email from us and make sure your contact information is updated by sending changes to membership@uurmapa.org.

Our website, uurmapa.org, and our FaceBook page facebook.com/groups/2003125769981908 will be updated with conference news.

Tuition is \$45, a bargain these days. Financial aid is available and you can apply for that by sending a message to treasurer@uurmapa.org.

This conference will be mediated through Zoom, but two in-person pods will be organized, in Wilmington Delaware and in Kingston, Massachusetts. If you wish to attend either of these pods, you can indicate that when you register. Inasmuch as pod attendees incur additional expenses, financial aid for pod attendees will be available upon request after the conference. For more information, send a message to treasurer@uurmapa.org.

Registration for the conference is now open. Here is the link to register:

uurmapa.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/2752248

Presidential Ponderings

**By Rev. Dr. Susan Veronica Rak
UURMaPA Board President**

Well, how are you all doing? We've been witnessing some pretty frightful things (life-destroying fires and floods, a season fraught with soul-draining, system-destroying and economic mayhem — at least here in the U.S.), and for each of us some personal struggles and triumphs.

However it is with your spirit at the moment, I do hope you are looking forward to joining your fellow UURMaPAns for the Spring Conference, coming up in just a couple of short months! It seems like it will be an opportunity to build resilience to face whatever besets us, and also to feel the joy of being together, even if it's virtual.

Continued on page 4

Back in January, I did a guest preaching gig and was hard-pressed to find a difficult to conjure a suitable topic and service to meet their situation. I started with a general idea and went from there, choosing the title “Be the Blessing.”

The days before the service I wondered what I had gotten myself into. Me, a blessing? Bless who, or what ... and when? Now, in this moment, we may not all feel particularly blessed or strong enough to take up the challenge of blessing anyone. So I’m just going to share a snippet of what I wrote — maybe it will spur some thoughts in you.

Episcopal priest and writer Barbara Brown Taylor wrote that the best way to discover what giving blessings or being a blessing is all about is to pronounce a few.

A blessing begins in noticing — seeing what is before us as it is ... as hard as that may be at times. And this seeing, this noticing, should take us out of ourselves, shift our focus from our own navel, our own importance or centrality, and open ourselves to others.

“Start throwing blessings around,” Taylor continues, “and chances are you will start noticing all kinds of things you never noticed before.”

When you’re in line at the store, maybe impatiently tapping your foot or nudging your cart, try blessing the people around you. The person in front of you, the clerk at the register (if there is one) or the person trying to herd the crowds through the self-check-out lines; the increasing line of people behind you, the whining child and the fumbling adult juggling too many things. Every one of them is dealing with something significant. We just don’t know for sure, but we can still care. They are heading somewhere, just as you are. And they are no more certain of what’s happening at the other end than you are.

To pronounce or offer a silent blessing is to offer attention and pay heed to what happens in the air between you and that other person — and all those other people. Something shifts. They may never notice you or feel that blessing directly, but something changes inside you. Something is pulling you into community, as we are drawn to one another by an invisible thread. And perhaps in this we gain more courage to find ways to protest and resist what is wrongful and corrupt.

We offer blessings, not because we are divine beings who have super-powers that give people special things, but because we are human beings who can learn and appreciate what a blessing is and how to give them away.

To choose to bless the world, as Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker once advised us, brings us into community. And in it we become that blessing.



Friends, fellow UURMaPAns, it may not be much, but it’s what I can offer in this moment.

Peace and blessings,

Susan

Reverend Dr. Susan Veronica Rak, retired

Table of Contents

Title	Pages
Spring Conference: Called to Connect in the Midst of Change	1-3
Presidential Ponderings by Rev. Dr. Susan Veronica Rak	3-4
Table of Contents	5
Connections Corner	6-7
Welcome to New Members	7
Tell Me a Story, By Wayne Walder	8-9
Obituary: Jean Newton Box	10
Obituary: Lackey Rowe	11-12
Obituary: Maxine (Hertel) Steeves	13
Obituary: Paula Kreisberg Ulrich	14
Save the Dates	15



CONNECTIONS CORNER

Want to strengthen your connections with other UURMaPAns?
Here are some opportunities:

Join a GENERAL-INTEREST ZOOM GROUP

74 UURMaPAns are now involved in 12 "General-Interest" Zoom Groups

Though self-governing as to format and schedule, most groups

- > Have 5-8 members
- > Choose a Convenor/Facilitator member
- > Meet monthly for a 90 minute session to
 - * open and close with a reading
 - * give each member 5 minutes to share "How is it with thy Spirit"
 - * spend the remaining time discussing a topic chosen at the prior session (and choosing the next session's topic.)
- > Each fall and spring, free all to "depart with thanks" or re-commit for 6 months more.

To explore joining an on-going Connections Zoom Group, or forming a new one, email fhudson@uuma.org.

Try Out a FOCUSED-INTEREST ZOOM GROUP (Learn more by contacting Convenors directly)

Goddess Group

Convenor: Sydney Morris - Email: samorris@uuma.org Phone: (906) 370-3927

We meet monthly. We check in, and then go around to answer the question "How has the goddess shown up in your life this month?"

Grief Support

Convenor: Duane Fickiesen - Email: dfickeisen@uuma.org Phone: (717) 448-3279

For UURMaPAns who have been recently widowed and are grieving the loss of their partner meets monthly. Each of us grieves in our own way. We offer a safe and confidential space to find support in our separate journeys.

Caregivers

Convenors:

Makannah Morris Email: revs2uu@aol.com Phone: (434) 384-7821

Yvonne Strejek Email: yesyvonne@gmail.com Phone: (510) 684-1471

Kathleen Ellis Email: kellis@uuma.org Phone: (512) 567-2115

For UURMaPAns caring for another person, who come together for an hour of check-in, shared resources, and caring for one another. We covenant for confidentiality.

Continued on page 7

CONNECTIONS CORNER, continued

Partner with (or Become) a LOCAL AREA CONNECTOR

Our membership is clustered into 35 Geographical Areas.

In 17 areas, Area Connectors now offer

- > welcomes to newly retired & new-to-Area UURMaPAns
- > annual check-ins with continuing Area UURMaPAns
- > support to survivors at an Area UURMaPAn's death

Check out your Area's listing. <https://uurmapa.org/resources/#Area-Connectors>

> If your Area has a Connector, contact them to join in their ministry.

> ***If your Area has no Connector, email fHUDSON@uuma.org to explore how to partner in this ministry.***

Let's Connect!!

Fritz Hudson – Connections Co-ordinator — **Email:** fHUDSON@uuma.org



Welcome to New UUURMaPA Members

Bill & Mary Sinkford

Galen Guengerich

Kathryn Rickey & Donald Shinnamon

Patricia Owen

Mark Gallagher

Cheryl M. Walker

Tell Me a Story

Photos and article by Wayne Walder

I love stories. Stories where we lost our keys and then found them. Stories where we did not know what to say and then we did. Stories where we found it hard to enter a room and poignant stories where we found it even harder to leave.

Most people love stories; that is why Netflix and so many of the streaming platforms are popular.

In the decades we ministers have served, and the decades our partners have watched us do ministry, I bet we know thousands of stories. They are stories about our lives and the lives of the people we served. I bet among us we have stories that can make us laugh so hard tears roll down our cheeks. Nick Cardell told me one about his first funeral where he tipped over the casket; I cried laughing. We also have stories that can make us cry with overwhelming grief.



Those of us who are ministers — we are part of an odd profession. A profession that requires and required us to be at our wisest at any time. Yet even when we attempt to be at our wisest, anything can happen. Sometimes events, relationships, crises, would go beautifully; things would work out in the end. Sometimes situations would go hysterically wrong, and we laughed. Unfortunately, there would be other times when life would fall apart before us. Sometimes we fell apart too, often alone. There are

stories in all of these tellings.

Our work has never been easy, it has been wonderful, hilarious and troubling. As retirees from that life, it's easy to forget what we did, what we learned and what made us more sensitive people, more caring people, and more aware people. It's easy to forget what we did.

This is why I am asking you to tell us a story. Will you remember a story and send it to me before August of this year? I'm hoping as we remember and tell our stories. Sometimes "we" are noble people, it's good to remember.

Continued on page 9

The stories need only be your stories: where you learned, laughed and possibly cried. Stories where your teaching actually worked, on you or on a beloved.

In our April conference, we will have three storytellers, and I will interview a couple of them. They will tell simple stories — nothing other-worldly, just stories of insight. Hopefully, these three stories will inspire you to send me one of your stories before our fall conference. That conference might be about stories — if you send them.

Remember, if you do not tell us your story, who will?

Write one page or make a video of about five minutes. If you can't write it, call me and tell me the story and I will transcribe it. I'll edit it with your permission and get your approval. Then you can tell us your story and make us all proud of the profession we loved and love in so many ways.

Tell me a story ... don't be shy! revwayne@live.ca



One of the many heritage homes in Perth, Ontario. Photo by George Buchanan.

Obituary: Jean Newton Box

Jean Newton Box, 98, passed away peacefully April 26, 2024, at Commonwealth Assisted Living in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Mrs. Box and her family appreciated her longevity and she wrote this obituary herself.

Jean Newton was born in Maywood, Illinois, on June 13, 1925, to Leon and Viola Newton. He was a locomotive engineer and she was an elementary school teacher. Jean grew up in a musical family. At nine she moved from piano to flute, which she played into her 90s.

She graduated from Cornell College, Iowa, in 1947 with a major in sociology. Her first position was in an American Friends Service Committee student program for attendants at New Jersey Psychiatric Hospital in Trenton. There she met Howard Box, who was attending Yale preparing for the ministry. They married in 1952. She found the position of minister's wife quite to her liking and saw the opportunity to use her social work skills in their congregations.



Rev. and Mrs. Box served congregations at the Unitarian Church in Newburgh, New York; the First Unitarian Congregation in Ottawa, Canada; the Society for Ethical Culture in Brooklyn, New York, very similar to the Unitarian denomination; and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

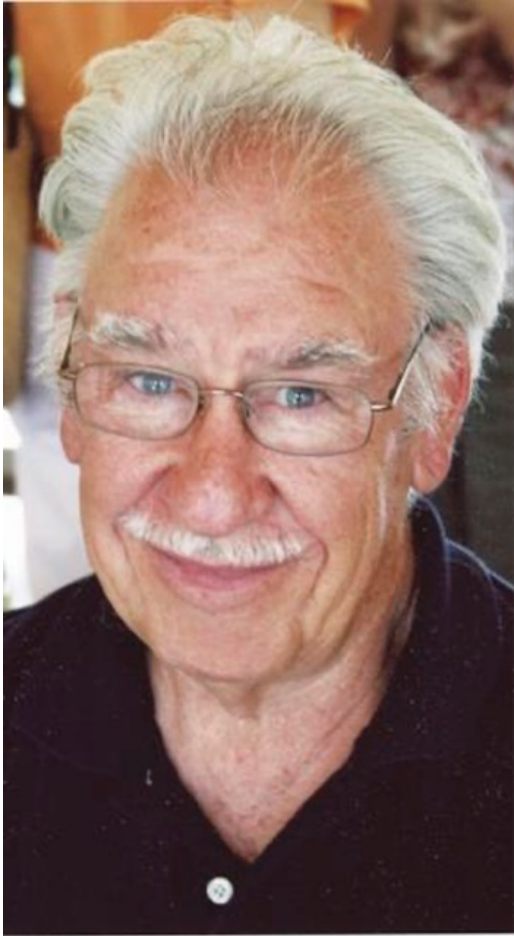
It was an interesting experience to live in Canada, another country. Daughter Ruth and son Gordon were both born there and have dual citizenship. Through most of her life, Jean had part-time jobs in social work or positions on boards. In Brooklyn, she and two other members performed music for congregations in the New York City area. In Oak Ridge, Jean was in the Community Band, the Symphony Orchestra, played solos and accompanied the church choir. She gave private flute lessons to 150 students in the Music Arts School from 1980 to 2000.

Rev. Box retired in 1991. They continued to live active lives in Oak Ridge. In 2018 they moved into Commonwealth Senior Living, where Howard died in 2021 after 68 years of marriage.

The Boxes are survived by daughter Ruth Westfall of Mahomet, Illinois, son Gordon Box (Betsy Williams) of Durham, North Carolina, daughter Carol Box (Alessandro Nicita) in Switzerland, and three grandchildren.

Memorial contributions in Jean's honor may be made to the Oak Ridge Unitarian Universalist Church or to the charity of one's choice.

Obituary: Lackey Rowe



BREVARD, N.C. — Lackey Rowe, husband of the Rev. Jean McKnight Rowe, died Dec. 8, 2024, of Alzheimer's. He was born June 12, 1938, in Union City, Tennessee, the son of Lester Lackey Rowe Sr. and Helen Miller Rowe.

He grew up all over the south — Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky and Mississippi — but always returned to Memphis with his dog Red, a present on his 6th birthday, who lived 18 years. An only child, Lackey was given all the things most children think they want, such as a pony, cars, attention and support. After a long string of schools, he graduated from Columbia Military Academy in Columbia, Tennessee.

After high school, Lackey joined the Marine Corps Reserves for eight years and trained at Parris Island. He attended Memphis State University, then attained a B.S. in psychology from the University of Mississippi. After a stint in the Philippines as a math tutor in the Peace Corps, he returned to Old Miss and earned a law degree in 1966. He had a reputation for his liberal stance on all matters political and/or controversial in Mississippi. That year, he married Andromache Castanis. They had two daughters, Helen and Nicole.

He was admitted to the Mississippi Bar and hired as a staff attorney with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law in Jackson. As a civil rights lawyer, he tried cases all over the state, assisted by prominent lawyers from across the U.S. who came to work with the Lawyers' Committee. Suddenly, he was learning law from the best and brightest lawyers in the country and trying cases with their assistance because he was the only one on staff who was licensed to practice law in Mississippi. Three days after his first day at work, he was in court challenging the discriminatory jury composition in a criminal case.

In 1969, he joined the U.S. Equal Opportunities Commission, working in Memphis and St. Louis. Later employment included being real estate and human resources director for Marriott Hotels in New Orleans, Minneapolis and Nashville, and human resources director at The Peabody Hotel in Memphis.

He was divorced in 1991 and in 1994 married Rev. Jean McKnight Rowe. They lived in Memphis until 2005, when they retired to Brevard. He was active in the NAACP, the Unitarian Universalists of Transylvania County, and was an avid writer of letters to newspapers in Memphis and Brevard.

Continued on page 12

He died with a huge debt of gratitude to lawyers who practiced in Mississippi in the 1960s and who are still fighting for racial equality. If his life stood for anything, it was “equal justice under law” and abolishing racial discrimination. This is how he wanted to be remembered.

He is survived by his wife Jean; daughter Nicole Rowe Heroux; one granddaughter; one great-granddaughter; stepsons Michael J. Rickard (Julie Jeannine) and Kenneth C. Rickard (Amy Hobby); and two step-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his daughter Helen.

There will be a memorial service at Unitarian Universalists of Transylvania County and another at Neshoba UU Church in Memphis, dates to be determined.

Donations in his memory can be mailed to Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, Attn: Development Department, 1500 K Street NW, Suite 900, Washington, D.C. 20005.



Obituary: Maxine (Hertel) Steeves

NEWBURYPORT, Mass. — Maxine S. (Hertel) Steeves 95, widow of Rev. Bertrand H. Steeves, died Nov. 13, 2024.

Born March 29, 1929, in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, Maxine was the daughter of Max and Emma (Lamothe) Hertel. After graduating from Fitchburg State Teachers College, she taught in Fitchburg and Leominster. This drive continued later with home tutoring for students and adults with learning disabilities.

In 1952, she married the one and only love of her life, Rev. Bertrand H. Steeves, (save for a lighthearted crush on author A.D.III, which was well known to Bert and the family). Bert died in 2020 at age 94. They were married 68 years.

From 1956-1994, she joined Bert and his calling at the First Religious Society, UU, in Newburyport, Massachusetts, where she was not just the First Lady but a passionate advocate for justice and civil rights. Here, as the powerful woman she was, she stood by his side fighting racial injustices and for LGBTQ and civil rights, even going as far as to go out in the middle of the night to spray paint over neo-Nazi skinhead graffiti like some kind of ninja for justice. She marched with Martin Luther King and fostered a small child from Kenya, who grew up to have a large part in South African apartheid.

At home, she hosted dignitaries from across the globe and shared life in a small New England community. In these roles, she maintained her grace, wisdom and a sense of delightful humor. She was recognized with many accolades, including entrance into the Clara Barton Sisterhood, honoring her enduring legacy of courage and compassion.

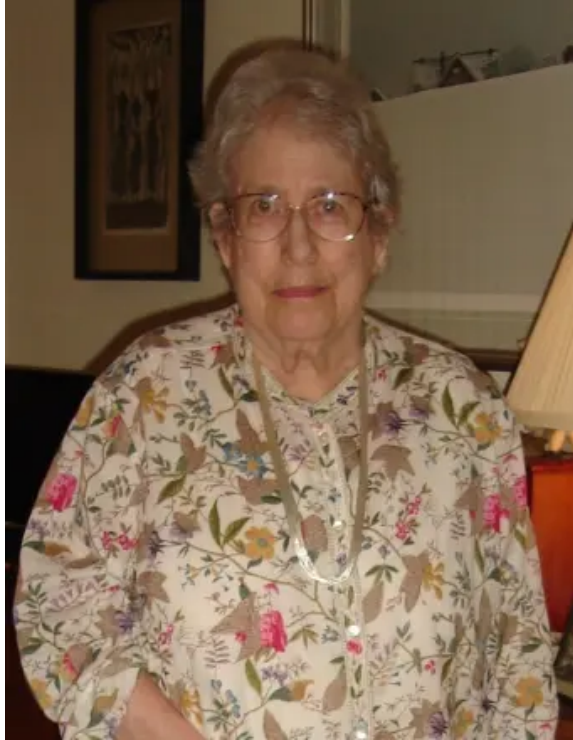
Maxine and her family enjoyed wonderful summers at their cottage in Fryeburg, Maine, soaking in its natural beauty and tranquility. She was known to bring English flashcards along on these vacations, much to the dismay of her children. As if that wasn't enough, she also forced anyone present to play Scrabble (which she always won and knew she would). If you knew the difference between "there" and "their," you had her undivided attention.

At age 72, Maxine became a published author of booklets: "Glimpses of the Past" and "Root and Branches."

The gift of her life will continue to be treasured by her children: Jonathan R. Steeves; Kathryn W. Steeves and husband Stephen I. Weiss; and Christopher I. Steeves and husband Thomas J. Brewer; as well as five grandchildren and two step-grandchildren. The family will have a burial at Oak Hill Cemetery, Newburyport, in August 2025, where Bert and Maxine will be laid to eternal rest together.



Obituary: Paula Kreisberg Ulrich



Paula Kreisberg Ulrich died on Jan. 1, 2025, in Edmonton, Alberta. She was born in New York City on May 17, 1936, the daughter of Ralph Kreisberg and Natalie Liflander.

Paula attended City and Country School and later, Fieldston Ethical Culture School in New York. She graduated from Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, majoring in child development, and later from the University of California at Berkeley with an MSW degree in clinical social work.

In 1972, Paula and her family immigrated to Canada and settled in the Peers area, near Edson, Alberta. She and her husband were part of the “back to the land” movement.

After her children were grown, Paula worked at the Edson Office of Alberta Mental Health and later set up her own private practice, Fireweed Counselling. Paula had a major stroke in 2000, after which she and Carl retired to Edmonton.

She is survived by her husband, Carl; daughter, Micaela (Scot Morgan); and son, Jethro (Ania), five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. She was predeceased by her parents; brother, Michael Kreisberg; and stepson, Benjamin Ulrich.

A Celebration of Paula’s Life was held on Jan. 11, 2025, at the Westwood Unitarian Congregation in Edmonton.

In lieu of flowers, friends are welcome to make a donation in Paula’s memory to [Seed Change](#), 56 Sparks Street, #600, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5B1.

 **SeedChange**
Formerly USC Canada

Save the Dates

UURMaPA Spring Conference,
April 21-23, 2025

UURMaPA Fall Conference,
October 20-22, 2025

