



Elderberries

Unitarian
Universalist
Retired Ministers
and Partners
Association

Volume 42 Number 1

Winter 2026

www.uurmapa.org

Spring Conference News

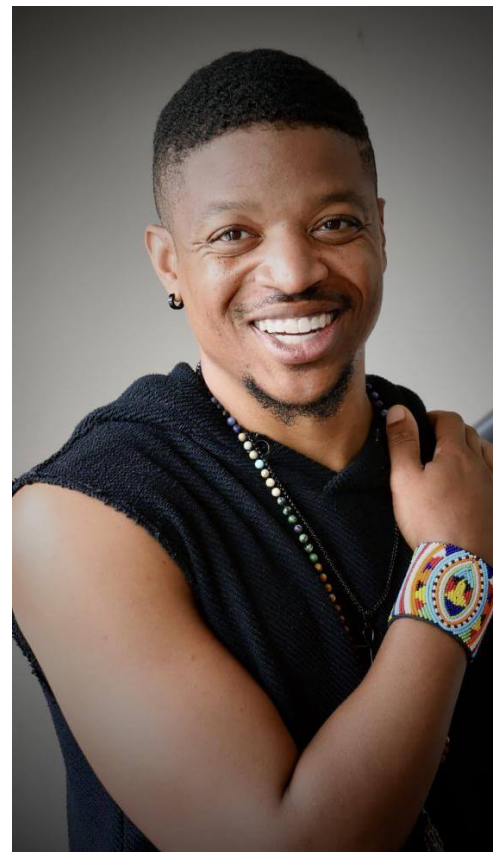
Keeping it Together While Democracy is Falling Apart

By the Rev. Jeff Briere

Our spring conference opens on Monday, April 27, and the theme is “Keeping it Together While Democracy Is Falling Apart.” We have organized eight sessions: three on Monday, three on Tuesday, and we’ll close the conference with two on Wednesday.

Our theme will be presented on the second day by Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout. He is a worship artist and longtime leader in Unitarian Universalist communities, and he suggests that our role as elders is not to retire into withdrawal but to remain, and to bear a posture of openness that teaches us what is still possible, even where we least expect it to last, when the songs keep needing to be sung.

The conference will feature a minister’s odyssey with Diane Miller, and a partner’s odyssey with Barry Finkelstein (see their pictures on the continuation page). Diane said, “As an elder, I find myself looking back at decades of ministry and asking, ‘What was that all about!?’ I hope that sharing my Odyssey will provide some insights.” Barry reminds us that sharing our life journeys is a wonderful way of connecting with one another and embracing our common humanity, and so important in these dark times.



**Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout,
theme speaker and concert
leader.**

Barbro Hansson, who has guided several conferences for the board, said, “I have loved every minute of this ministry, which helps our members connect with one another in meaningful ways and explore what really matters, like how to keep it together in these challenging times.”

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**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 wise copyediting and layout by Elderberries copyeditor Carrie Buchanan.

The deadline for submissions to our next edition (stories, pictures, poems, book reviews all welcome!) is May 11.

Speculations

By Rev. Dr. Richard Speck

UURMaPA Board President

The announcement came out of the blue. There was a call for clergy to go to Minneapolis to witness what Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was doing to the population of that city. I immediately talked over with Janet Tillman, my wife, the idea of going. I would be representing each of you in learning how to resist the overly aggressive nature of these federal employees who were grabbing people off the street, harassing U.S. citizens and murdering people in cold blood because they dared to not back down.

I submitted my request to come as part of the broader call for clergy from all faith traditions to gather and learn together how to protect our own communities when ICE comes to where we live. I was approved to go, and I immediately booked my flight and a hotel. I applied for a stipend from the UU Service Committee to help offset the cost. They granted me \$500 to help out. It was announced that I was going, in church the next Sunday. A woman from First Unitarian Church, Wilmington, where I am a member, came up to me and thrust a \$50 bill into my hand and wished me success and safety.

I traveled on Wednesday 1/21/26 from Philadelphia to Minneapolis by way of the Nashville airport. I got to my room late that evening and prepared for the next day. Putting on my long underwear, electric socks and three other layers of clothing, I took a Lyft to Westminster Presbyterian Church in downtown Minneapolis.

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Speculations, continued

During my stay there, I took several Lyft rides, with almost all of the drivers being from someplace other than America. When I shared why I was there, they all said they were appreciative of my coming to lend my energy to the resistance. I only met one driver who opposed what we were doing.

There were several hundred clergy from all faith traditions present. We heard inspiring speeches detailing what was happening and the steps to oppose ICE. There were rousing chants and songs to bolster our spirits. This helped us be grounded in what we were about. A Native American, Jim Bear, gave us a history of how the military had a prison for native people on the same site as the present ICE detention center in Minneapolis. Junauda Petrus, the Poet Laureate of the City of Minneapolis, recited an inspiring poem.

One speaker quoted Howard Thurman: “I believe with all my heart that our task is two-fold — seek how we may release to the full our greatest spiritual powers that there may be such a grand swell of spiritual energy that existing systems will be upset from sheer dynamic — and make whatever temporary adjustments as may prove helpful in relieving intolerable situations until there is genuine uprooting.”

We learned that “Ice out” is a part of Minnesota culture. It’s the day in the spring when the last chunk of ice melts in a lake, and the lake becomes liquid water again. Neighbors who live on lakes bet on what day it will happen. It makes the news headlines in small town papers. It’s the sign that spring is just around the corner.



So, ICE OUT is something they take seriously. It means the turning point when the seeds that were dormant all winter will soon grow.

A quote from one speaker: “This is a relay race, not a marathon, not a sprint ... a relay race. Ya’ll are here to take the baton and then you’re gonna go home and keep passing the baton. We need everyone, from all demographics, to pick up the baton at some point.”

Just before lunch, four busloads of clergy fanned out across the city to be on the lookout for ICE activities. I was paired with a Jewish woman who worked for a social service agency in New Jersey. It was bitterly cold as we walked down the streets looking for any ICE movements near us.

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Speculations, continued

I thought I saw one black SUV with dark windows drive by, that might have been ICE agents.

The Hispanic businesses in the neighborhood were either closed or deserted. On the way back to the bus, we stopped in a grocery store that was open and bought food to support them. I bought a bag of Cheetos with chili flavoring that was manufactured in Mexico. It was a little too hot for me to eat a lot at one time. Luckily, there was a good meal waiting for us when we returned.

The rest of the afternoon was discussing what would happen on Friday. We were told about the opportunity to make a statement on our social media feeds at noon. We also learned that only local clergy were being asked to put themselves in a position to be arrested at a protest at the airport on Friday morning, due to the organizers not having the capacity to support out-of-town clergy who might be arrested.

We then went by bus to First Universalist, where we had a worship service and communal meal. I led the singing of “We Are a Gentle, Angry People” during the service. It was a thrill to be among colleagues lifting their voices in such an inspiring protest song. There were about 200 UU ministers who came to Minneapolis as part of this call to action. I then returned to my hotel for the evening.



Friday morning, I went to San Pablo/St Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is a church in the Phillips neighborhood with a large Latine population. Here, we learned about the impact of ICE’s operations on their church and neighborhood, and learned from experienced ICE Watch organizers. We took a walk around the neighborhood to see for ourselves.

While we were there, an ICE operation targeted the people in the neighborhood and some people were injured. The church runs a medical clinic for the neighborhood. The church was

Continued on page 5

Speculations, continued

locked down to prevent ICE from coming in. The church threw together a tasty vegetable soup for everyone while we waited. When it was safe, we left the church in small groups so as to not attract ICE attention.

When I had time, I composed my submission to the “Voices at Noon: A Collective Witness” on Friday. These were the questions we were asked to reflect upon.

- What from today stayed with you the most — and why?
- What did you witness today that clarified why this moment matters?
- Why did you answer the call to Minneapolis, and how did today deepen or challenge that reason?
- What responsibility do you feel carrying forward after today?
- What does “truth and freedom” mean to you in this moment?

I joined others downtown at a Target store where we crowded the entrance and sang protest songs for about 30-40 minutes. No one could come in or out while we were there. I heard later that the store closed early due to the protest march. Those of us at the Target store walked several blocks in the bitter cold to join the 50,000 to 70,000 other people marching to protest ICE. We ended up at the Target Center Arena, where we heard rousing speeches opposing ICE and continuing to mount resistance.

Then it was back to First Universalist for another wonderful meal with fellow clergy to share our experiences of the day. I traveled back to my hotel near the airport to be ready for a 7 a.m. flight home via Midway Airport, Chicago. While I was in the air, ICE agents shot and killed Alex Pretti not too far from San Pablo/St Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church where I had been a few hours before. I returned home just before the big snowstorm hit Delaware and dumped nine inches on the ground.



I have told many people why I went. I said I was too young for Selma, but not too old for Minneapolis. I believe this is the moment when all of us need to rise up and oppose this brutal regime that seeks to divide and intimidate us into submission. But I learned first-hand that if we stick together, we can win this struggle for our democracy and the freedom for all of us in this country.

Yours in the Faith,
Richard Speck,
President UURMAPA

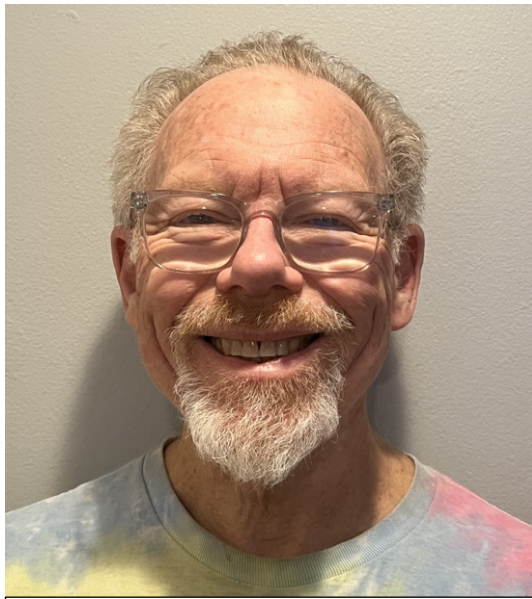
Spring Conference News, continued

The opening worship service will be produced by Wayne Arnason and Kathleen Rolenz. As always, a memorial service is planned to honor those colleagues and partners who have left us. Tom Schade has gathered several people to produce the memorial service and a closing worship.

Connecting rooms, where we can interact with others on a deeper level, are planned for three sessions. One will follow the theme presentation and be guided by what we learn from Dr. Rideout, our own experiences and our hopes for the preservation of democracy.



Rev. Diane Miller, who will do the minister's odyssey.



Barry Finkelstein, who will do the partner's odyssey

The last session on Tuesday will feature Dr. Rideout in a concert of music that underscores the theme and inspires us to live into our role in keeping it together in challenging times. There's more to this conference, so be prepared for connections, inspiration and fun when we meet in April.

For information about registering, fees, and scholarships, please visit uurmapa.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3106236

Inflation and tariffs finally caught up to us, and we regret that we must raise our fee for the conference to \$70.

If you need help with the fee, send a message to conferences@uurmapa.org and ask for assistance. Barbro Hansson will give you a special code to use when registering. Barbro is the registrar, so she can also help you with the registration process.

We look forward to greeting you in April at our spring conference. In the meantime, know that every one of us has a part to play in our struggles for inclusivity and justice. If you live in the U.S., you might be a little closer to the heat, but if you do not, you are still here, you are more than a witness, and we're all in this together.



CONNECTIONS

Want to increase your connections with other UURMaPAns? If so, there are opportunities to connect through General and Focused Interest small groups, Area Connectors, and the new Skill-Sharing Network.

1. Join a GENERAL INTEREST ZOOM GROUP

70 UURMaPAns are currently participating in 12 General Interest Zoom Groups

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

- Have 5-8 members
- Choose a Convener/Facilitator
- Meet monthly for a 90-minute session to
 - Open and close with a reading
 - Give each member 5 minutes to check-in or share “How is it with thy Spirit”
 - Spend remaining time discussing a topic chosen at the prior session and choosing the topic for the next session.
- Each fall and spring, free all to “depart with thanks” or re-commit for 6 months more.

Some groups are composed of retired ministers, and some include both retired ministers and partners. To explore joining an on-going General Interest Zoom Group, or forming a new one, email Janet Tillman at connections@uurmapa.org.

2. Try a FOCUSED INTEREST ZOOM GROUP

CURRENT FOCUSED INTEREST ZOOM GROUPS

➤ Caregivers

Conveners: Makannah Morris, revs2uu@aol.com, Yvonne Strejeck, yesyvonne@gmail.com and Kathleen Ellis, kellis@uuma.org

A Zoom support group for UURMaPA members who are caring for another person meets monthly. If you are a caregiver, you are welcome to join other caregivers for an hour of check-in, shared resources, and caring for one another. Participants covenant for confidentiality. For more information and to join the group contact one of the conveners noted above.

➤ Grief Support

Convener: Duane Fickeisen, dfickeisen@uuma.org

An on-line support group for UURMaPAns who have been recently widowed and are grieving the loss of their partner meets monthly. Duane Fickeisen says: “For an hour and a half, we

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CONNECTIONS, continued

check in, catch up as we process our grief, and share resources. Each of us grieves in our own way. We offer a safe and confidential space to find support on our separate journeys.” For more information and to join the group, contact Duane Fickeisen.

➤ **Writing for Witness as Resistance**

Convener: Gail Collins-Ranadive, revgcr@aol.com

This group is for anyone refusing to shut down and shut up, as seniors are often expected to do, in response to the chaos, corruption, and cruelty of the current times. Group participants write on a chosen topic to access and then share their knowing, experience, and wisdom, thus creating a record of Truth against “mis and disinformation” we are subjected to daily.

Writing for Witness is an option for those who are no longer physically able to be on the frontlines in demonstrations, marches, and protests who have a wealth of experience and wisdom to share. For more information and to join the group, contact Gail Collins-Ranadive.

➤ **Goddess**

Convener: Sydney Morris, samorris@uuma.org.

The *Goddess* small group is a non-judgmental and confidential gathering that provides a safe space for members to share their life experiences, connect with their feminine energy, and support each other's personal growth, empowerment, and spiritual development. For more information and to join the group contact Sydney Morris.

➤ **Partners**

Convener: Janet Tillman, jetillman@comcast.net

A partners' small group is an opportunity for retired ministers' partners to:

- Come together with other partners to discuss topics chosen by the group, share personal experiences, and establish a social network.
- Share information that is practical, constructive, and helpful.
- Offer support and encouragement to other group members and receive the same in return.
- Talk openly without worrying that remarks will have an impact on their minister partners in some way.
- Share joyful moments and have fun.

This group is currently at its maximum number. To start a second Partners' Group, a convener is needed. If you are interested in convening a second Partners' Group, contact Janet Tillman at connections@uurmapa.org.

➤ **Penelope's Bones Book Discussion Group**

Convener: Holly Horn, hhorn@uuma.org

This group meets monthly (it started on November 17) to discuss *Penelope's Bones: A New History of Homer's World through the Women Written Out of It* by Emily Hauser. Published in 2025, it is a great combination of imagination, the very latest scientific research, scholarship, feminist and queer analyses.

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CONNECTIONS, continued

The group meets on the THIRD Monday of every month from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Eastern time, 12 p.m. Central time, 11 a.m. Mountain time, 10 a.m. Pacific time, to discuss one chapter at each meeting. Since there are 16 chapters, this group will go on for a while. Anyone can join at any time; all you need to do is read the one chapter under discussion for that month. To get involved, find out what chapter is up, or to get more information, contact Holly Horn.

➤ **UU Mystics Group**

Convener: Lilia Cuervo, cuervouu@comcast.net

The group's purpose is to help its members nurture and enhance their spiritual life, especially by being attentive to the first source of our UU living tradition, *the direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life.*

The group meets monthly via Zoom, on the 4th Thursday, at 4 pm Eastern Time, 3 pm Central Time, 2 pm Mountain Time, and 1 pm Pacific Time. Facilitation of the meetings rotates among the members. To join the group or get more information, contact Lilia Cuervo.

3. Connect with (or become) a LOCAL AREA CONNECTOR

UURMaPA membership is clustered into 34 Geographical Areas.

In 17 Areas, there are Connectors who:

- Welcome newly retired and new-to-Area UURMaPAn's,
- Offer support to survivors at an Area UURMaPAn's death,
- Participate in annual check-ins with UURMaPAn's in their Areas, and
- Facilitate other connection opportunities as moved by Area colleagues' spirit and energy.

To find out if your Area has a Connector, go to <https://uurmapa.org/caring-network/> and scroll down to your Area where you will find the contact information for your Connector. I encourage you to contact your Connector to learn about Area activities and to seek connection and support as needed.

In 17 areas, Connector activity awaits your initiative to become an Area Connector. If you would like to become an Area Connector, contact Janet Tillman at connections@uurmapa.org to explore the responsibilities and rewards of being an Area Connector.

Thanks to all the Small Group Conveners and Area Connectors who make meaningful connections possible!

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CONNECTIONS, continued

4. Learn a new skill and/or share a skill through the new UURMAPA SKILL-SHARING NETWORK

In January, an email was sent asking you to imagine UURMaPA as a virtual community where members share their unique talents, knowledge, and skills. In response to the email and to initiate the establishment of the Skill-Sharing Network, three very generous UURMAPA members are offering to share the following skills.

➤ **Beginning Spanish** – Jeff Jones (Smyrna, GA)

I have provided Spanish Classes at the College for Seniors in Asheville, NC. I am happy to offer a full year of beginning Spanish (32 weeks), and a year later, I can offer a full year of intermediate Spanish (28 weeks). I estimate that 4 hours of preparation per week are necessary to get the full benefit of the classes. I also ask those taking my classes to give two hours per week to serve the immigrant community. It is completely on the honor system, and no one needs to tell me what they are doing, although sharing experiences and ideas on serving the immigrant community could be beneficial to all in the class. You simply must agree to it as part of signing up for the class.

As to 32 weeks of Spanish, it would be divided into 4 parts, each part taking 8 weeks, with a short break between parts. Each class will be 2 hours long, with a 10-minute break in the middle of the class. The classes will be 2-4 p.m. EST on Thursdays. Schedule for the classes is:

Part 1 (the first 8 weeks) starts Thursday, April 2, and goes through Thursday, May 21.

Part 2 (the second 8 weeks) starts Thursday, June 4, and ends Thursday July 23.

Part 3 will be in September and October.

Part 4 will be in January and February 2027.

Part 1 is Beginning Spanish. If you already have some Spanish skills you may want to enter a class at Part, 2, 3, or 4 based on your proficiency in Spanish. My goal is to teach a class of 6-10 participants using Zoom. The classes are very interactive and fun. If you are interested in learning Spanish, contact me at jeffjonesuu@aol.com and we can discuss which part is appropriate for you.

➤ **Composting/Recycling** – Jaco ten Hove (Bellingham, WA)

If you're tossing out your household kitchen waste—such as coffee grounds and eggshells—and you're not recycling yard waste, such as leaves and grass clippings, you're wasting all the good stuff! All these items, which end up in a landfill, belong in your compost bin. As an experienced (and certified!) *Master Composter/Recycler*, I can offer counsel and coaching on composting/recycling from general guidelines and pep talks to specific habits and routines that improve the odds for keeping your waste out of landfills. Join me in my new ministry: *Waste Diversion*. Contact me at bthishere@gmail.com for more information.

➤ **Appreciating Technology + Tips on Maintaining an Old Building** – Norm Horofker (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

I am a retired mechanical engineer with plant management experience. How that relates to sharing skills with other ministers is to be determined... perhaps sharing optimism for

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CONNECTIONS, continued

appreciating the present and the amazing future of technology. I also have experience maintaining old buildings. Contact me at nhorofker@aol.com to begin a conversation about technology or that old building you are maintaining.

Learning Opportunities Sought: In the same January email, members were asked about the learning opportunities they would like to see available through UURMaPA's Skill-Sharing Network. To date, the responses to this question are:

- Learn from others about maintaining a web site and presence on social media. I am working with a group of individuals who are working to preserve the oldest Universalist Church building in Canada. I see this as an opportunity to promote Universalism's theology... including an annual Universalist re-union in Nova Scotia Canada.
- Explore with others about the direct line between Unitarian Universalism and the European Enlightenment. I see a theological thread that helps me to have optimism for our future.

As you can see, the sky is the limit regarding knowledge/skills to share and people's desire for learning opportunities.

- Is it possible that a facilitator (or co-facilitators) would be interested in a time-limited series of discussions about the direct line between Unitarian Universalism and the European Enlightenment? Groups of this nature could be an abbreviated version of a focused-interest group. Those not wishing to commit to an on-going general or focused-interest group may prefer a 6-8 session format exploring a particular topic.
- Is there someone out there who can share their skills maintaining a website as well as a presence on social media?

If you have a skill to share or would like to add your desired learning opportunities to the Skill-Sharing Network, contact me at connections@uurmapa.org. You can also go to the UURMAPA website at <https://uurmapa.org/resources/> to learn more about the Skill-Sharing Network. I hope you take advantage of one or more of the many ways to connect with other UURMaPA's.

"Perhaps the secret of living well is not in having all the answers but in pursuing unanswerable questions in good company." -Rachel Naomi Remen

Janet Tillman, Connections Coordinator

Save the Date

**UURMaPA Fall 2026 Conference,
Oct. 19-21, 2026**

Nominations

Our hard-working Nominating Committee provides us with the following nominations for the UURMaPA Board and Nominating Committee.

The Reverend Fred Wooden, Elderberries Editor



Fred Wooden spent 43 years serving six churches spread over five states. During that time, he served on the Hymnbook Commission that created *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Commission on Appraisal, he created programming for General Assembly from 1998-2000, was alumnae/i president for Meadville-Lombard from 2001-2005 and served on the Board of Review from 2005-2013. He also was a newspaper columnist for three papers in central Massachusetts and Brooklyn, New York, between 1981 and 2004, and a local radio host from 2011-2018.

In retirement, his pilgrim travels have led him to Spain, England, Peru, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Turkey, India, China, Japan and Israel. His Yuletide stories, an account of his walk along the Kumano Kodo and a memoir from following in the footsteps of those who marched from Selma to Montgomery, have all ripened into self-published books.

Currently, when not writing, he is a board member and past chair of the Urban League of West Michigan, father of two adult sons, grandfather of two, and spouse of Wendy for 50 years this coming October; but they met at age 9.

Board Member-at-Large for Conferences

No candidate at this time

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Board Nominations, continued

The Reverend Mary McKinnon Ganz, Secretary



Before going to seminary in her 50s, Mary was a news reporter for the Associated Press and the San Francisco Examiner and for many years an active lay leader in the Oakland, California, UU church. Her church work led her to community organizing, and community organizing led her to seminary. As a UU minister, she served our congregations in Arlington, Virginia, Brewster, Massachusetts, and San Francisco, where she also served the UU co-founded street ministry Faithful Fools. She retired in 2018 from positions as assistant minister for pastoral care at UU San Francisco and court herald at the Faithful Fools.

In 2016 Mary graduated from the Spiritual Guidance program at Shalem Institute, and in retirement she maintains a small practice in spiritual direction.

She and her spouse, the Rev. J.D. Benson, have three children and four grandchildren. In 2022, they moved to Connecticut to be closer to the grands. In

retirement, besides playing with grandchildren, they travel a bit and look for ways to get into good trouble.

The Reverend Richard Nugent, Treasurer

Richard served as the Director of Church Staff Finances (CSF) of the Unitarian Universalist Association from August 2008 to December 2025. In that capacity, he led a team managing the UUA's retirement plan, national health plan and other employee benefit plans. In addition, the CSF serves as a human resources resource to UUA member congregations, including recommendations regarding staff compensation, benefits and staffing practices. In addition, CSF administers the UUA Living Tradition Fund and various other institutional aid funds providing financial assistance in times of economic need to religious professionals and other congregational staff.



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Board Nominations, continued

Richard earned a B.A. in Economics from George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and a Masters of Divinity degree from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. He was ordained to the UU ministry in April 1997. From 1997 to 2008, Richard served as interim minister to seven congregations.

Before attending seminary, he spent 22 years working in public policy. He worked as a staff assistant to two United States Senators (Senator Gaylord Nelson and Senator Joseph Biden) for eleven years (1972-1983); as a political/market research consultant (1983-1984); as Director of Government Affairs for the Epilepsy Foundation for seven years (1984-1991); as administrator of a health care project in Indonesia (1992-1993); and as a lobbyist for the Unitarian Universalist Association (1996-1997).

Richard resides in Washington, D.C. with his wife, Eileen, and his son, Asa.

The Reverend Phyllis Hubble, Nominating Committee



For 14 years, Phyllis worked as an attorney at the U. S. Department of Justice, before hearing a call to the Unitarian Universalist ministry. I spent the first 14 years of my ministry as co-minister with my spouse, John Manwell, at the First Unitarian Church of Baltimore. During those years, I served on the ministers' committee advising and organizing for LGBTQ equality under the leadership of Equality Maryland. I also served on the Board of Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice, where I started a Washington area subcommittee to organize support for LGBTQ equality issues before the Maryland General Assembly.

After John's heart attack in 2007, we formally retired. However, we continued to do interims and developmental ministries on an increasingly part-time basis until 2022.

In 2015, we went to our first UURMaPA conference, remembering our involvement in Selma. Inspired, I got excited about the idea of capturing our memories of the civil rights struggle for LGBTQ rights in our faith and in our country. In 2017, I became the program chair for the fall Attleboro conference on spirituality while beginning work on the two conferences this year which are part of the Rainbow History Project. In 2018, I became the Vice President of UURMaPA and served for one year.

Obituaries

Rev. Ev Morris: Scientist, Poet, Lover of Mystery

A eulogy presented by Rev Debra Thorne at Ev's Celebration of Life on Sept. 12, 2025



Ev Morris started life on an expected path. The youngest of three boys, he was born with a sharp and inquiring mind, he did well at school, excelled in chess, loved golf. His work ethic and commitment to learning was strong. The early plans for his life arose from what Ev was naturally good at, science and engineering, subjects that would lead to a good and stable profession.

He earned a bachelor of science in industrial engineering from Stanford, then another in engineering mechanics from the University of Washington, a master's degree, also from the University of Washington, in aeronautical engineering, and later a doctorate in engineering mechanics from Iowa State. His son, TR, noted it was no small feat to leap around these different fields.

His early professional jobs included working for General Electric and Boeing. A teaching career followed at Youngstown State University, Gonzaga University and the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. Over time, Ev's son Dave said, his father discovered that what he was good at doing, wasn't satisfying; that talent at something doesn't mean you have found your true calling.

Ev's soul was a whimsical, wondering one. His soul lured him with questions like: 'What is beyond all this practicality? What lies behind the physicality of the world? Where does science lead? What does it all mean, where does it all go? After years of teaching, raising his two sons, Dave and TR, and later the ending of his marriage to Elizabeth, Ev's life veered towards the very edge of these questions. From midlife on, Ev was drawn to where the known world ended and the unknown began. One foot on the shore of the known and one foot in the ocean of mystery. So stood Ev.

And where better to explore the unanswered or unanswerable questions that science asks, than religion. Buddhism was helpful, meditation and contemplative practices were a container and focus for learning about his mind, the transcendence of his personality, and the simple but challenging practice of awareness, day to day. Ev dove deeply into Buddhism and meditation, especially with the author and teacher, Jack Kornfield. Ev took many workshops and retreats with Jack at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California. And there was a perfect fit with

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Obituaries, continued

Unitarian Universalism; a religion that married the inquiring mind and the searching heart, that loved to ask questions in the crucible of community. Ev went back to school to prepare for the ministry, this time to the Unitarian Universalist theological school, Starr King, in Berkeley California. Now a fellowshipped minister, Ev continued to learn and grow and served UU congregations in Monterey, California; Salem, Oregon; Reading, Pennsylvania; and Beacon Unitarian in the Tri-cities of British Columbia.

Ev's longtime friend Harold Rosen said Ev's ministerial focus was on a multilayered approach to creating religious community, where each individual was encouraged to be both in the world of justice and love, and to search for their spiritual path or philosophic understanding. Now, Ev also claimed a poet's soul, from which he poured his love for nature, for science, for animals and humans, and for the small and great mysteries of this life. Jack Kornfield says, "Poetry is spare and tough and tender and gets under your flesh, down to someplace deep in the psyche and in the bones." Ev wrote poetry throughout his life. For a period, when he was teaching, he created a poem a week. One Christmas his gift to his wife, Joan, (married 25 years!) was the promise to write her one poem a month for the entire year. When Ev retired, with Joan's help, they collated a lifetime of poetry and writings into a book called "**Life: My Sense of the Holy,**" where I found the following poem:

How to Act with Sunsets, Hawks and Babies

My friend and I happened on a habit
when we bump into a bit of beauty scattered on our path --
the red-tailed hawk that sits his grey and weathered post,
the cloudy sky that crochets a single hole of blue
with soft and silver lace,
a baby scrunching up its face into a smile
(but not yet getting both the sides the same) ---
with joys like these, we've come to say, "God, You done good!"
Yes Sir! We'd sometimes give a sunset the perfect score of 10,
just standing quiet, opened mouthed and ready to applaud.
But this I cannot do each time.
Sometimes when red-brown wings swing open and crash down,
sometimes my heart goes up too fast.
Or when the last shard of sun slips down and out of sight
and western clouds go gilt against chartreuse and blue,
I almost ache to be enough to hold it for a while,
and give it back with echoes from my eyes
and with a full-grown smile.
Some things are oh so beautiful!
Some things so damned divine.
I just don't know if I should clap my hands or cry.

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Rev. James “Jim” R. Covington

Rev. James “Jim” R. Covington lived his earthly life from April 27, 1942, to Nov. 12, 2025, reaching the age of 83. Born in Union City, Tennessee, he grew up in a Southern Baptist tradition and was ordained into the Southern Baptist ministry at the age of 17. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and religion from Union University, Tennessee, in 1964, and graduated from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kentucky, in 1967.



After a brief period serving as an associate minister at a Southern Baptist Church in Maryland in the late 1960s, Jim struggled with growing restlessness about organized religion and shifted his vocational path toward counseling. He received a Master of Arts in psychology from Goddard College, Massachusetts, in 1978 and went on to practice independently as a psychotherapist in New York City for 16 years, working with individuals, families, and groups.

Though his work in counseling and social services was deeply meaningful, Jim felt an unfulfilled call to preach, to engage in communal ministry and to help heal spiritual alienation. During this time, he gained a deeper understanding of Unitarian Universalism and developed a growing sense of affinity with its values and worldview. When he attended the Unitarian Church of All Souls in Manhattan and read the tenets of the UU faith on the face of the bulletin, his sense of belonging was immediately confirmed. He joined the congregation in 1987.

During his time at All Souls NYC, he began officiating at interfaith weddings and eventually became one of the top 25 wedding officiants in New York City, a list that includes some who officiate at upward of 300 marriages a year.

After becoming UU, Jim’s interest in parish ministry returned. While he had occasionally preached over the years, he now felt that he could preach and be true to himself. For him, Unitarian Universalism was a part of a humanistic, liberal religious tradition that he could publicly embrace and feel proud of. He sought to help communities promote healthy social change through preaching, counseling and social action, both locally and denominationally.

Jim entered the UU ministry with great care and discernment. He served the UU Congregation of the Hudson Valley, Croton-on-Hudson, New York, from 1990 to 2011. Under his leadership,

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the music program flourished with increased participation, more time was devoted to meditation, and worship took on a more cohesive spirit of celebration. He worked closely with the Religious Education Director and the RE Committee to strengthen the Religious Education Program. Jim often played the piano for congregational singing and delighted in leading children in a children's song at the beginning of the worship. He also told children's stories before they left for their classes. The energy of the congregation became positive and contagious. An excellent preacher, he brought warmth, vitality and deep spirituality to Sunday services. He retired in 2011, and in 2016, the Hudson Valley congregation honored him as their minister emeritus.

In addition, in 1990, Jim was appointed as a District Consulting Minister to the small society in Croton, New York (the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Briarcliff, Croton and Ossining). He served this congregation for over three years, helping them revitalize the community and clarify its vision for the future.

Jim could create an atmosphere of goodwill that made people want to follow him. He showed up for his congregation. From advocating for marriage equality and environmental justice to fostering a more welcoming and diverse congregation, he was well known in his wider community. His ministry was rooted in love and justice, and he excelled in pastoral care and counseling.

In urging people to love others and turn from judgement, Jim counseled, "We don't need to judge others; we just need to let our particular beauty and goodness unfold, while staying in touch with our Center that will be our sure and steady guide. We can only know what love asks of us and be content to respond from our Center and let our lives speak."

In the aftermath of 9/11, Jim wrote: "I pray for wisdom over prideful revenge. I pray our consciences will be quickened and clear. I pray our anger will guide us to the right path of justice. I pray that our fear will heighten our awareness of the preciousness of life and not immobilize us. I pray our sadness will embolden us to savor life even as we know more than ever that life is fragile and suffering is inevitable. I pray our hope in the greater goodness of people will not falter. I pray we will not fall to self-righteousness or deny our own hypocrisy. I pray we will continue to cherish each other and love one another, knowing humbly that no one is perfect, and that if we care enough, we can see the same tears, pain and joy in the face of another that are in ourselves. Amen. Love to all."

Jim is survived by his wife, Suzanne Hall Covington; his daughters, Alexandra Coor and April Accomando; his son, Eric Covington; his grandchildren, Christina Watson, Matthew Accomando, Oliver Coor, Sophie Coor, and Graham Coor; as well as his great-grandchildren, Leddy and Wylder Watson. A memorial service was held at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Hudson Valley, Croton-On-Hudson, New York.