



# Elderberries

Unitarian  
Universalist  
Retired Ministers  
and Partners  
Association

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[www.uurmapa.org](http://www.uurmapa.org)

*Spring Conference Wrap-Up*

## ***'Keeping it Together' a resonant theme***

by the Rev. Jeff Briere

Our spring conference concluded April 29 with a service offered by the worship team that reminded us of the role that immigrants played in the stories of North America. The closing song, a paean to the Statue of Liberty by Joe Jencks, recounts immigration to America, and concludes with these evocative words:

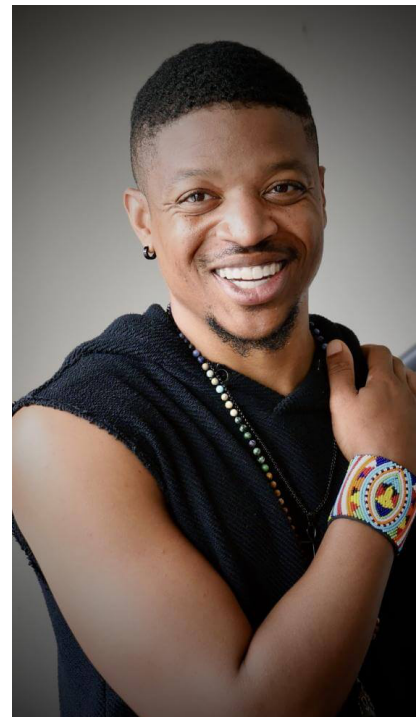
*And she welcomes them with open arms  
she says let my children in  
Shine on, Shine on  
Oh you Lady of the Harbor*

The song is not meant to belittle, nor ignore, Indigenous American peoples, nor those brought here against their will. Rather, the song reminds us that the story has not ended, and immigrants arrive daily. How we respond will be part of our legacy.

Maybe that wasn't the entire takeaway from our conference, in which we thought about "Keeping it Together When Democracy Is Falling Apart." But the anti-immigrant posture of the current U.S. administration was not very far from our thoughts during the three-day conference.

Monday was filled with a worship service by Kathleen Rolenz and Wayne Arnason, which took its inspiration from paintings and poems; an Odyssey with Barry Finkelstein; a session of connecting rooms; and a remembrance service honoring colleagues and partners who have "left this part of life."

Tuesday featured two appearances of Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout, our theme speaker. He presented his take on our theme and also offered a peek at his conducting and philosophy of singing in a choir. We also instituted a new



**Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout**

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**Greetings from the Elderberries editor**

*George Buchanan here. I'm currently the editor for Elderberries. This is my last issue in this role. Beginning July 1, Fred Wooden will take over as Elderberries editor.*

*Before or after July 1, send any story suggestions or ideas for improving Elderberries to elderberries@uurmapa.org*

*I deeply appreciate the information provided by so many of you over these past two years, and the wise copyediting and layout advice from my spouse Carrie Buchanan as Elderberries Copy Editor.*

**Speculations**

**By Rev. Dr. Richard Speck  
UURMaPA Board President**

We have had another very successful conference, this time with a keynote address and concert by Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout. He gave us a lot to think about as we face a troubling future in this country. We had deep Odysseys given by Barry Finkelstein and Diane Miller to share their life journeys with us. Along the way, we had small group conversations with each other. Our worship services helped set the stage for our conference and the remembrance service is always a highlight where we remember and celebrate those members who have died in the past six months.

Barbro Hansson has led this effort for the past few years and has built a strong core of a planning team. Jeff Briere chaired the conference planning team, and Cynthia Becker kept the Zoom fires burning quite ably.

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## ***Speculations, continued***

Here is a list of all who were involved:

- Jeff Briere - Convener, Publicity, Slide Show & Soundtrack Creator
- Alison Stephens - Scribe
- Tom Schade - Worship Coordinator
- Anita Farber-Robertson - Connecting Rooms Coordinator
- Ned Wight - Connecting Rooms Coordinator
- Sonya Sukalski - Pod Promotion & Support, Themed Breakout Rooms
- Jef Gamblee - Tech Assistant
- Barbro Hansson - UURMaPA Board Conference Coordinator, Registrar
- Cynthia Becker - Zoom Master

Not on the Planning Team, but helped:

- Kathleen Rolenz - Opening Worship
- Wayne Arnason - Opening Worship
- Joan vanBecelaere - Advisory to Worship Coordinator
- Lilia Cuervo - Worship Team
- Rosemarie Smurzynski - Worship Team
- Gretchen Weiss - Worship Team
- Sarah Pearson - Worship Team
- Ibrahin Sarmiento, Jr. - Worship Team - recording services
- Emily Browder - Worship Team - played the piano for Remembrance Service and closing worship
- Lydia Robertson - Worship Team - edited recordings (daughter of the late Rev. Frank E. Robertson)
- Jan Carlsson-Bull - Remembrance Service Narratives
- Anne Marsh - Remembrance Service Narratives
- Richard Speck - Moderator
- Christine Robinson - Conference Chaplain
- Marni Harmony - Conference Chaplain

In addition to all of these people were over 20 facilitators. Here are their names:

Ellen Johnson-Faye, Marta Flanagan, Richard Gilbert, Nina Grey, Bruce Marshall, Janet Newman, Ken Read-Brown, Sarah Richards, Maddie Sifantus, Rosemarie Smurzynski, Terry Ellen, Phyllis Hubbell, Susan Rak, Mary Moore, Anita Farber-Robertson, Judith Campbell, Dan King, Suzie Matranga-Watson, Frieda Gillespie, Lisa Schwartz, Jonalu Johnstone, Jim McKinley, Meredith Garmon, Anne Hines, Norman Horofker, Ned Wight, and Richard Speck.

By now, hopefully, you have received the notice that we are eliminating the spring conference and will only offer one conference a year. Our planning teams have done tremendous work to

**Continued on page 4**

## ***Speculations, continued***

pull off two full conferences a year since the pandemic forced us into virtual gatherings. There is a lot of behind-the-scenes work to create these conferences. It has been harder to recruit willing volunteers to put in the hours necessary to make a conference successful. Just read the names above and you have a sense of the work that goes into creating our conferences. The board debated the merits of continuing two conferences or creating alternative events that are less time-consuming in the planning. We felt that the efforts were more than we can continue to mount in the format of two full conferences.

While people have truly enjoyed participating in the two conferences, going to one in the fall is an opportunity to try different types of programming that will still bring us together over the internet. We will still offer two remembrance services each year and two sets of Odysseys to hear about our very interesting lives. The difference will be that one fall conference will have all those elements, and spring will have each of these as stand-alone entities. Stay tuned as we develop these new ways of being together.



The Rainbow History Project is almost finished. We have heard from Skinner House that the book will be printed this spring/summer. For those of you who do not know about this project, it was started back in 2019. Here is the description:

“UU RAINBOW HISTORY PROJECT 2019 is the Golden Anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising 50 years ago. UURMaPA is honoring this anniversary by sponsoring two conferences and launching the UU Rainbow History Project. The UU Retired Ministers and Partners Association is collecting and highlighting the stories of LGBTQIA ministers, their partners and allies who influenced and were affected by the sometimes-uneven trajectory of LGBTQIA issues within the UUA. Here’s how:

- In two conferences, east and west, led by LGBTQIA colleagues
- In video interviews with LGBTQIA colleagues, partners and allies, sharing their experiences.
- In a book capturing the historic challenges and contributions of UUs from the beginning of the gay rights movement.
- In a website, social media, and archives to keep alive the stories of a significant turning point in UU history.”

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## ***Speculations, continued***

You can access the website, <https://uurainbowhistory.net/>, and read video interviews, read stories of our LGBTQIA pioneers in the Unitarian Universalist Association, and hear through their stories the struggle for equality in our ministry and our faith. I plan on buying the book when it comes out and I encourage you to also buy it. I hope it will be required reading on the Ministerial Fellowship Committee list of required books for ministerial formation.

When next I write, I will have returned from a trip to visit our Transylvanian Unitarian co-religionists. Janet and I are joining a small group on a 10-day pilgrimage to the home of Unitarianism. I'll post a picture of the places we visit.

Until then, enjoy spring in all its glory. An old Irish blessing for us all:

*May the road rise up to meet you,  
May the wind be always at your back,  
May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
The rain fall soft upon your fields,  
And, until we meet again,  
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.*

Yours in the Faith,  
**Richard Speck,**  
*President UURMAPA*

## **Save the Date**

**UURMaPA Fall Conference,  
October 19-21, 2026**



## ***Conference Wrap-up, continued from page 1***

element of our conferences, themed breakout rooms, in which participants in which participants were offered prompts for a discussion of the concepts presented by Dr. Rideout.

Wednesday wrapped up our conference with an Odyssey with Diane Miller and another round of connecting rooms. During our conference, we surprised Sonya Kulkalski with the Unsung UURMaPAn Award and Betty Stapleford with the Creative Sageing Award. (See pages 13-15 for more on these awards.)

Tom Schade led the worship team, and he said, “We tried to make it as close to live as possible — one set and service edited to look continuous, as in real time.” Looking back, he thought “The Remembrance Service was the most important for us, and the key was superb narratives. I’m grateful to the team.”

Anita Farber-Robertson and Ned Wight administered the connecting rooms, and for Anita, being part of the conference planning team, “was like being in a good jazz band — each member played their instrument when called for and improvised to make it work when there were gaps. I had the pleasure of connecting with colleagues I had lost touch with and the chance to offer comfort to those who are facing challenges. I couldn’t ask for more.”

Ned was amazed at “the rich array of perspectives on ‘keeping It together.’ Art and music in the opening worship, heartfelt sharing in connection groups, provocative wordplay in the theme talk, riveting narratives in the two Odysseys, touching our grief in the remembrances. Thanks to this conference for enabling us to ‘keep it together’ together.”

“I have been resonating with Glen’s question about how the body shows up in a structure that is not made for it,” is what remains for Sonya Sukalski. She resonated with being “a square peg being shoved into a round hole, and it is useful to let the tension of that inform us rather than gloss it over and bear the affront of having our edges knocked off.” She is thinking about her award and considering how she might pay it forward to a few organizations where she sees unsung heroes.

Jef Gamblee assisted our Zoom Master, Cynthia Becker, and acted as “Tech Chaplain.” He says we are getting more comfortable with Zoom and more tech-savvy with every conference. He was pleased to take very few calls for technical problems. Nevertheless, technical problems bedeviled us again during this conference. Look elsewhere in this issue of Elderberries for more information about technology and our conferences.

This conference is the last of its kind. Beginning in the fall of 2026, we will produce only one three-day conference each year. It will be scheduled for the fall, leaving the board to produce an event for the spring, during which a remembrance service and Odysseys will be offered.

The dates for the fall conference are Oct. 19 through 21. We hope to see you then!



# CONNECTIONS

"Be someone's rainbow today." – Unknown

## 1. AREA CONNECTORS

I want to begin the Connections article by highlighting Area Connectors and extending a big “thank you” to all the Area Connectors who:

- Welcome newly retired and new-to-Area UURMaPAnS,
- Offer support to survivors at an Area UURMaPAn’s death,
- Participate in annual check-ins with UURMaPAnS in their Areas,
- Facilitate other connection opportunities as reasonable based on the size of the Area and Area colleagues’ spirit and energy, and
- Notify the UURMaPA Passages Coordinator of any partner deaths in their areas.

UURMaPA membership is clustered into six regions and 35 Geographical Areas. The chart below shows the areas with Connectors as well as those areas in need of Connectors.

Reg	Area	Connector(s)	Reg	SEEKING CONNECTORS
1	MAINE	Lucy Ijams	1	BALLOU-CHANNING
1	NEW HAMPSHIRE	Nadine Swahnberg	1	CANADA EAST
1	VERMONT	Brendan Hadash	1	CENTRAL MASS
2	J. PRIESTLEY NORTH	Paula Maiorano	1	MASS BAY NORTH
2	OHIO MEADVILLE	Janet Newman	1	MASS BAY SOUTH
2	ST. LAWRENCE	Richard Gilbert	1	CONNECTICUT VALLEY
3	VIRGINIA	Fritz Hudson	2	J. PRIESTLEY SOUTH
3	FLORIDA	Bob Murphy, Eleanor Richardson & Peter Richardson	2	METRO NY/NJ
3	SOUTHWEST	Jonalu Johnstone	3	EASTERN CAROLINAS
4	HEARTLAND NO.& SO.	Frederick Wooden	3	WESTERN CAROLINAS
4	CEN.MIDWEST NO.& SO.	Marcia Marino	3	MIDSOUTH/TENNESSEE
4	PRAIRIE STAR NORTH	Roberta Haskin	5	ROCKY MOUNTAIN
4	PRAIRIE STAR SOUTH	Diane Miller, Seeking co-connector	5	ARIZONA/SO. NEVADA
5	NEW MEXICO	Christine Robinson, Claudia Elferdink & Gary Kowalski	5	NO.CAL.INLAND/ NO. NEVADO
5	CANADA WEST	Carl Ulrich & Linda Horton	5	NO.CAL.COAST/HAWAII
5	OREGON/ IDAHO	Suzie Matranga-Wilson	5	SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
			5	WASHINGTON/ALASKA
			6	OVERSEAS

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## CONNECTIONS, continued

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 18 areas, Connector activity awaits you to become an Area Connector.** Having multiple Co-Connectors helps lighten the load, especially for those Areas with many retirees or a large geographical range. If you would like to be an Area Connector or Co-Connector, contact Janet Tillman at [connections@uurmapa.org](mailto:connections@uurmapa.org) to explore the responsibilities and rewards of being an Area Connector.

## 2. GENERAL INTEREST ZOOM GROUPS

**Seventy UURMaPA members are currently participating in twelve General Interest Zoom Groups.**

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

- Have 5-8 members
- Have 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, members can choose 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](mailto:connections@uurmapa.org).

## 3. FOCUSED INTEREST ZOOM GROUPS *(Learn more about each group by contacting the Conveners directly.)*

### ○ **Caregivers**

**Conveners:** Makannah Morris, [revs2uu@aol.com](mailto:revs2uu@aol.com), Yvonne Strejeck, [yesyvonne@gmail.com](mailto:yesyvonne@gmail.com) and Kathleen Ellis, [kellis@uuma.org](mailto: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.

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## CONNECTIONS, continued

### ○ **Grief Support**

**Convener:** Duane Fickeisen, [dfickeisen@uuma.org](mailto: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 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](mailto: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](mailto: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, [connections@uurmapa.org](mailto:connections@uurmapa.org)

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 has three openings.*** If you are interested in joining the Partners Group or convening a second Partners' Group, contact Janet Tillman.

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## CONNECTIONS, continued

### ○ ***Penelope's Bones* Book Discussion Group**

**Convener:** Holly Horn, [hhorn@uuma.org](mailto:hhorn@uuma.org)

This group meets monthly (it started on November 17, 2025) 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.

The group meets on the THIRD Monday of every month from 1:00pm – 2:30pm Eastern time, 12:00pm, Central time, 11:00am Mountain time, 10:00am Pacific, 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](mailto: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.

## 4. UURMAPA SKILL-SHARING NETWORK

Four very generous UURMAPA members are offering to share the following skills.

### ○ ***Spanish Lessons*** – Jeff Jones

Jeff has provided Spanish Classes at the College for Seniors in Asheville, NC. On April 2, 2026, Jeff began Beginning Spanish I that goes through May 21. Beginning Spanish II is running from June 4 to July 23. Beginning Spanish III will be in September and October with Beginning Spanish IV offered in January and February 2027.

Each class is 2 hours long, with a 10-minute break in the middle of the class. The classes are 2-4 p.m. EST on Thursdays.

He estimates that 4 hours of preparation per week are necessary to get the full benefit of the classes. He also asks those taking the 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 him what they are doing, although sharing experiences and ideas on serving the immigrant community could be

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## CONNECTIONS, continued

beneficial to all in the class. You simply must agree to it as part of signing up for the class. Each class can have 6-10 participants using Zoom. The classes are very interactive and fun. If you already have Spanish skills, Jeff can assist you in determining which session would be best for you. He also plans to teach Intermediate Spanish in 2027. If you are interested in learning Spanish contact Jeff at [jeffjonesuu@aol.com](mailto:jeffjonesuu@aol.com).

- **Composting/Recycling** – Jaco ten Hove

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*, Jaco 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 Jaco in his new ministry: *Waste Diversion*. Contact Jaco at [bthishere@gmail.com](mailto:bthishere@gmail.com) for more information.

- **Appreciating Technology + Tips on Maintaining an Old Building** – Norm Horofker

Norm is a retired mechanical engineer with plant management experience. He is happy to share his optimism for appreciating the present and the amazing future of technology. Norm also have experience maintaining old buildings. Contact Norm at [nhorofker@aol.com](mailto:nhorofker@aol.com) to begin a conversation about technology or that old building you are maintaining.

- **Sustainable Investing** – Jim Zacharias

Are you invested in oil? Do your investments include tobacco and guns? Most of us simply don't know where our money is invested. Many funds are not transparent about the screens they use to choose investments. As a result, we may unknowingly support industries and practices that go against our values. Jim believes there is a way forward. In his retirement Jim explored how to live sustainably — without worrying that his money is working against what he holds sacred. That search has been worthwhile, and Jim is glad to share what he has learned. If this resonates with you, Jim welcomes a conversation and wants to hear your story. You can contact Jim at [jzacharias1@gmail.com](mailto:jzacharias1@gmail.com).

**Would you like to share a skill?** If you would like to add a skill/talent/hobby to the Skill-Sharing Network, contact Janet Tillman at [connections@uurmapa.org](mailto: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 will take advantage of one or more of the many ways to connect with other UURMaPAns.

*Janet Tillman, Connections Coordinator*

***“I love those connections that make this big old world feel like a little village.” - Gina Bellman***

## ***Unitarian Universalist Society for Ministerial Relief***

Formed in the latter part of the 19th century to aid elderly Unitarian ministers and their surviving spouses, this independent organization holds over \$20 million of investment, the income of which is granted quarterly to over 40 individual beneficiaries as long-term supplementary aid where retirement or pension provisions have not been adequate, or to meet unexpected expenses. Grants are based on financial need as determined by an application for aid provided by the Society (applicants must be at least 55 years of age).

Officers: Rev. Harold E. Babcock, President; Rev. Frank Clarkson, 1st Vice President; Rev. Jenny Rankin, 2nd Vice President; Rev. Dr. Susan Suchocki Brown, Secretary; Rev. Christana Wille McKnight, Treasurer.

Board Members: Rev. Dr. Sheldon Bennett; Rev. Dr. Mark Caggiano; Ms. Rebecca Scott; Rev. Heather Janules.

For more information and to download an application, visit our website:

[www.uuministerialrelief.org](http://www.uuministerialrelief.org) or contact our secretary at [revsusansmr@gmail.com](mailto:revsusansmr@gmail.com).



### **UU Society for Ministerial Relief**

Since 1850, providing financial assistance to ministers 55 years or older, and surviving partners.

To apply for a grant, visit [uuministerialrelief.org](http://uuministerialrelief.org) or contact Rev. Dr. Susan Suchocki Brown at [revsusansmr@gmail.com](mailto:revsusansmr@gmail.com) for more information.

**[www.uuministerialrelief.org](http://www.uuministerialrelief.org)**

# UURMaPA honors Sonya Sukalski and Betty Stapleford

By Charles J. Stephens

UURMaPA Vice President

The UURMaPA Board was pleased to present our two annual awards at our 2026 Spring Conference: the Unsung UURMaPan and the Creative Sageing awards.

**The Unsung UURMaPan Award** is given to a member who has not been recognized for their vital contributions to UURMaPA or for their generous service to others. The award honors a volunteer who has made an extraordinary contribution to our association, working behind the scenes during their retirement. The successful nominee will not have been recognized in this way elsewhere.

**The 2026 Unsung UURMaPan Award was presented to Sonya Sukalski** for sustained, steady leadership, compassionate service, and tireless behind-the-scenes commitment. After retiring from active ministry in 2022, Sonya joined UURMaPA through friends and small groups. She quickly moved from participant to dedicated volunteer: coordinating connecting rooms for the spring and fall 2023 conferences, guiding Odyssey presenters in spring 2024, serving as convener for the fall 2024 conference, and sharing convener duties for both the spring and fall 2025 conferences.



Sonya Sukalski

Along the way, she recruited and trained facilitators, kept plans, presenters, timelines and deadlines on track, and shaped team culture — always opening meetings with check-ins and helping create virtual relationship guidelines that strengthened the planning team. When her husband, Mitch, faced two rounds of leukemia treatment and bone marrow transplants, first in the fall of 2024 and then in the fall of 2025, Sonya’s resilience and devotion never wavered.

Even while balancing caregiving and urgent medical demands, she continued to contribute—transitioning into the pod connector role last fall—and remained a calm, steady presence who kept people connected and supported.

Sonya’s work exemplifies the spirit of this award: humble, essential service; leadership through listening; a generosity that kept UURMaPA gatherings running smoothly and compassionately.

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## **Honors, continued**

**The Creative Sageing Award** is given to a UURMAPA member for their outstanding service and creativity in pursuing new or continued ventures after retirement and building on one's experience in creative ways. This might involve, for example, mentoring, public service, fostering spiritual growth, writing/publishing, creating and or participating in community and denominational service projects and organizations.



**Betty Stapleford**

**The 2026 Creative Sageing Award was presented to Betty Stapleford** in recognition of her persistent volunteer service on behalf of immigrants and marginalized people during her years of active ministry and retirement in Southern California.

Betty initially embraced Unitarian Universalism in the 1960s in Atlanta, Georgia, because UUs were walking their talk concerning racial justice and civil rights. This established a trajectory of championing those experiencing social injustice throughout her ministerial career. About 15 years ago, when Betty was serving as minister at the UU Fellowship of the Con-e-jo Valley near Thousand Oaks, California, some members of the congregation initiated a project to transport visitors to the Ad-e-lanto Detention Center, which houses immigrants in the Mojave Desert over two hours away. Many family members of those detained had no way to travel to the facility.

Betty was moved by the plight of people held in detention not because they were criminals but because they lacked the necessary papers. She began driving people out to Adelanto each month to visit detainees and support their family members in doing so. The project now also posts bond, when possible, or provides assistance when people are released from detention. After release or deportation, some former detainees have kept in touch with Betty, whom some of the younger ones call "Ma."

Betty is active in other service organizations in her area northwest of Los Angeles, including Ventura County CLUE (Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice), working for racial justice and affordable housing, as well as 805 UndocuFund, and IOOVC, committed to getting ICE out of Ventura County. She has regularly attended, and sometimes spoken at, press conferences and immigration rallies, and even made sure to attend in a wheelchair when she had a broken foot.

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## ***Honors, continued***

After retiring from ministerial leadership at the Conejo Valley congregation, Betty served the UU Church of the Verdugo Hills in La Crescenta and then as the affiliate Community Minister for Social Justice at the Universalist Unitarian Church of Santa Paula, whose Social Concerns Action Committee has continued to increase its activity with food banks and other programs for this diverse community.

She regularly drove for the A-de-lanto project in the years leading up to the COVID epidemic, during which the 1,400-person detention center emptied out. After the COVID hiatus, she has resumed her monthly trips out to Adelanto.

"Visting can be heartbreaking, hearing stories of how detainees got there," she observes. "Many are asylum seekers. Medical care and food are terrible; all creature comforts are missing. At least we can offer compassion and listening ears — and see what's going on at the center."

The churches in Betty's community have become central to resistance and to supporting one another. At age 83, Betty continues her lifelong commitment to advancing justice through continuing visitation to the A-de-lanto Detention Center and to advocacy for immigrant justice in Ventura County in the face of increasing anti-immigrant activities by the federal government.

For consistently walking her talk and living out her UU values and commitments, we are pleased to honor Betty Stapleford with our 2026 Creative Sageing Award.

Each of these Award Recipients received a \$500 honorarium from UURMaPA.

We thank all those who participated in selecting Sonya Sukalski and Betty Stapleford as our worthy award recipients for 2026. We really appreciated all the members who made suggestions to us of other worthy UURMaPAN recipients.

We encourage all UURMaPA members to consider whom you might want to suggest for these awards in the future, possibly including yourself. UURMaPA is a talented group of retired ministers and partners. There are many individuals within our membership who are worthy of recognition but too often organizations fail to recognize their valuable participants.

Over the years, the Unitarian Universalist Retired Ministers and Partners Association has instituted these two awards to highlight the contributions of our members to UURMaPA and to the larger world.

We invite you to go to our [website](#) to read about past award recipients — do a site search for Award History if the link doesn't take you directly to that page.

## ***Behind the Screens: A Ruminaton on Ambition***

**by the Rev. Jeff Briere  
Conference Planning Team Convenor**

In our conference, during a discussion of the board's decision to eliminate the spring conference, we got sidetracked by a question that opened up a different topic and led to a discussion of technology in our conferences. The question was posed, "Are we too ambitious?" Does our reach exceed our grasp? Is it too much to Zoom recorded material, live presentations, worship services, Odysseys and board business, all in real time, and expect no problems?

That question was asked in response to what Barbro Hansson calls "glitches": those times when technology fails us or we fail to use it properly. The result is ugliness, on-screen or in our ears, and uncertainty all around.

I suppose I am not the person to provide a definitive answer to the question. But I can provide some context and some ideas to consider.

One thing I recall from my time selling cars is something Willis Amica told me when I was about 45 and just learning about sales. He said, "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got." Of all that I learned selling cars, only that has remained with me. Don't settle for what you have or what you are.

Although we can hold in-person conferences in one or two places around North America, it is prohibitively expensive to do so. And even if we could afford it, it is prohibitively expensive for most retirees to attend such a conference, unless it is held in their own back yard.

We can look at conferences from many angles and, eventually, we will perceive this truth: Zoom makes it possible for all of us to get together, even if we don't like the circumstances and the mishaps. Electronic communication takes travel and expense out of the equation. I can see no other method for all of us to gather in such a fashion and for such a time as we do with Zoomed conferences.

Another thing to remember is that audiences in the developed world, and especially in North America, have been trained by the best artists and producers and technicians in the world. We expect excellent media, because that's all we've ever seen or heard or read. None of us remember being amazed at the talkies. None of us remember when telephones came in. We've always had radios. Books have always been available in our native languages.

So, we expect excellent productions in print, on stage, on the air or in movie houses. When we experience a glitch, it is jarring and we don't know immediately what to do, except wait it out, which is annoying. Glitches don't happen in our TV shows or movies because everything is

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## ***Behind the Screens, continued***

recorded, and mistakes can be corrected. And believe me, the pros make mistakes all the time, but they can cover them up, and re-record.

Most of our conferences are recorded as well; live segments are few. So we can re-record and cover bloopers in those portions, too. But when we assemble everything live, in one take, we don't have the chance to redo a transition that failed or start a video again or correct anything in our one chance to get it right.

In my opinion, this is not overly ambitious. It's not unlike producing a worship service or a play or a live TV show. It can be done, and results are better with practice and repetition. Like George Harrison sang, "With every mistake, we must surely be learning."

Glitches can have several causes, and remedies are not easily found. Many things are not under our control, like the age and capability of our computers, the type of our connections (wifi or hard-wired) the quality and speed of our connections, our internet service provider, the traffic on the internet at any time, solar flares and interference, open microphones, background noise, and plain old mistakes, like the big one I made.

I was set to go on after Diane Miller's *Odyssey*, but my camera and microphone were turned off. I was engrossed in what she was saying and was not paying attention to what I was supposed to be doing. Cynthia could not see me and had to switch to a hymn while I got it together. I was mortified, but we all survived.

We are using technology originally meant for simple meetings with a few people in disparate locations. It was first released in 2012, and it's been improved several times. Fifteen years in electronic communication technology is like two lifetimes for humans. There are alternatives, but Zoom is entrenched — the word has entered the lexicon of Kleenex and Xerox, indicating that it is the leader in the field. We don't ask more from it than it can do, but it does get complicated at times. It's widely available, there is no affordable replacement, and it's easier than other systems for people to learn.

The people producing the conferences are not kids pushing buttons. We probably have more than 150 years' combined experience in theatre, radio and TV, movies, announcing, acting, sound and video editing, writing and production. We have worked for radio and TV stations, networks and independent production companies. We have produced homecomings, reunions and institutional anniversaries, and we truly love producing these conferences. Only one of us is compensated.

After each conference, the planning team meets for a post-mortem, during which we hash out our bloopers, flubs, mistakes and glitches. We make plans to do better.

Perfection is impossible. We aim for excellence, and we hope to achieve it. Maybe next time.

## Obituaries

### *Larry Allan Squire*



GUELPH, ONTARIO – Larry Squire, 65, of Fergus, Ontario, passed away, following a brief and complex illness, on March 26 in the Intensive Care Unit at Guelph General Hospital.

Born in Sarnia, Ontario, on Sept. 22, 1960, Larry was the son of Murray Evan Squire and Anna Elizabeth Allan Squire. He was a loving brother to Sharon Ann Squire (Scott) Hamilton, and beloved husband of The Rev. Felicia Mary Urbanski, whom he married in 1993.

Larry grew up in Sarnia, where he enjoyed playing baseball, curling and participating in local fall fairs. He attended Sarnia Central Collegiate and graduated from the University of Windsor with an M.A. and B.A. in Communications Studies.

He worked as communications assistant for Canadian Pacific Forest Products Ltd., as a database technician and research coordinator at the Lakehead Psychiatric Hospital, as a data analyst for Dimark Research Inc. and Q2 Consulting, and as an evaluation coordinator for the Community Services Council of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Prior to retirement he was a project manager for the Propel Centre for Population Health Impact at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, where he spearheaded programs for the Ontario Smokers' Helpline and other Canadian Cancer Society programs.

Larry was an avid volunteer, serving on TV Ontario's Regional Advisory Council, as the media relations officer for a candidate in a federal election, and as a church board member and newsletter editor. Recently he volunteered for the Ontario Senior Games Association and for the "Bike Buddies" program at Wellington Terrace Long Term Care.

Larry has always lovingly supported his wife Felicia, especially as her career led them to several relocations. They met in Thunder Bay, Ontario, moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, then to Stillwater and Tulsa, Oklahoma, finally moving back to Waterloo, then to Fergus, Ontario.

Larry loved playing pickleball several times a week, going bicycling with friends, as well as hockey, hiking, snowshoeing, canoeing and fishing. He was a creative writer, completing several original screenplays and other stories. Larry enjoyed watching art films and movies. For 10 years, Larry and Felicia also ran a pet-friendly Airbnb from their home, welcoming travelers and their animals with open arms. He loved spending time at the family cottage in Dorset, Ontario, as well as bringing joy to visits with his wife's family and friends in Connecticut.

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## ***Obituaries, continued***

Larry was always supportive, gentle, caring, inquisitive, creative, inventive, and loving. He made us smile and laugh. He will be greatly missed by his family, cousins and friends.

A funeral service was held April 21 at Melville United Church, Fergus. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Foundation of Guelph General Hospital or to Melville United Church.

## **Maria Chenoweth Sinkford**

Maria Chenoweth Sinkford died peacefully in Portland, Oregon, on Oct. 9, surrounded by the love of family. COVID had damaged her respiratory system beyond recovery. She had been hospitalized for almost three months.

Maria was a wife and mother. She was a social worker, world traveler, art lover, and an advocate for justice and compassion. Born in Indianapolis, she had also lived in Germany, Tennessee, and Boston before moving to Portland in 2010.



Maria is survived by Rev. William Sinkford, her husband of 20 years and former president of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Her children are Frederic M. Hadley and Josie H. Hadley of Indianapolis, and she had three grandchildren, four siblings and so many other persons whom she loved.

A memorial service celebrating her life was held on Dec. 6 at All Souls Unitarian Church in Indianapolis.

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## ***Obituaries, continued***

### **Ann Clark Howe**

Ann Howe, 99, of Raleigh, North Carolina, died peacefully, surrounded by family, on Aug. 14, 2024, after a brief illness.

She was born Ann Elizabeth Clark on Oct. 18, 1924, in Richmond, Virginia, to the late William Baker Clark and Louise Graham Clark. Ann grew up on the family farm in Buckingham County, Virginia. She entered college at age 16 and graduated from Westhampton College, University of Richmond, Phi Beta Kappa with a bachelor's degree in chemistry. She also earned a master's degree in organic chemistry at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.



She met Charles Howe at UNC after he returned from service in World War II, and they were married in 1947. Ann was an instructor in chemistry at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, worked as a research assistant at UNC, and then spent a decade at home with her children. She was an elementary science teacher at the Lab School at the University of Chicago while her husband was a seminary student. Ann received a Ph.D. in science education from the University of Texas at Austin in 1970 and became a professor of science education at Syracuse University, then head of the department of math and science education at North Carolina State University, and later head of the department of curriculum and instruction at the University of Maryland.

Ann was the first woman to hold a faculty position in her department at both Syracuse and North Carolina State. Her professional accomplishments are too numerous to detail here but included leadership roles in professional organizations, including president of the National Association for Research in Science Teaching (1983-84), a senior Fulbright scholar in Chile, editorial roles with professional journals, and author of many journal articles and two books.

In retirement, Ann became a painter and was a member of Cary Gallery of Artists. She was a longtime member of the UU Fellowship of Raleigh, where she served in various leadership roles. A person of great energy, curiosity and optimism, Ann balanced her professional achievements with a full family life, a love of travel, nature and gardening, and enjoying her many friends.

Ann was predeceased by her husband, Charles, and her brother, William B. Clark Jr. She was survived by daughter Judy Howe (Robert Harangozo) of Yonkers, New York, daughter Margie Chenery of Raleigh, North Carolina, and son David Howe of Albany, New York; grandchildren Patricia Chenery, Sally Howe, Nora Howe, and Caroline Harangozo; her sister Martha Bell, who died in January this year; her sister-in-law Jean Clark, and several nieces and nephews.

A memorial service was held Oct. 18, 2024, at the UU Fellowship of Raleigh.