

## “Eulogies: Message Part II”

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a homily by Dan Lillie  
delivered on January 14, 2018  
at First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque

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### **[NEW SLIDE: Jim Key]**

Most Unitarian Universalist don't identify as “evangelicals”, and in fact, many of us tend to find the term off-putting, to say the least. But Jim Key considered himself an evangelical UU, and wore the term as a badge of honor. “I want this faith that I love to reach out and find people who are searching for a liberal and liberating faith, but don't know that we are here,” he said.<sup>1</sup>

Jim didn't discover Unitarian Universalism until he was nearly 60; but once he found it, he jumped in with both feet, helping to found his home congregation in Beaufort, South Carolina, and then serving as the congregation's President.

Next, he went on to serve as President of the Southeast district of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Then in 2013, Jim was elected Moderator, the highest volunteer position in the UUA. He served in that role until 2017, resigning the position just weeks before he passed away.

Jim Key brought a relational approach to his job as Moderator, recognizing that the people and the process are just as important as the issues. He also believed a strong relationship between the Board of Trustees and the Administration of the UUA was important, and worked to build those relationships during his time leading the board.

I've often heard “convert” UUs share that they wish they had found Unitarian Universalism earlier in their lives, but with Jim as our example, we see that it's never too late to spread the good news of our faith to anyone who might be looking for us.

### **[NEW SLIDE: Denny Davidoff]**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/candidate-key>

2017 was a tough year for Unitarian Universalism. Not only did we lose Jim Key, we also lost former Moderator and long-time UU Denise “Denny” Davidoff.

Denny grew up in a conservative Jewish home, but as an adult went looking for a new religious community, and found it in the Unitarian Church in Westport, Connecticut. This was in 1960, a year prior to the merger of Unitarianism and Universalism, which means that Denny has been a Unitarian Universalist for as long as Unitarian Universalism has been a thing to be.

A few years later, in 1968, she attended her first General Assembly; and the next year she went again, and then again the next. In fact, Denny would never miss a GA for the rest of her life. Her attendance at the 2017 GA, just last summer in New Orleans, marked her 50<sup>th</sup> consecutive General Assembly.

As impressive as this is, Denny Davidoff did far more than show up for 50 years: she got stuff done.

Denny served as President of the UU Women’s Federation, chair of the General Assembly Planning Committee, board chair for the Church of the Larger Fellowship, our denomination’s “congregation without walls,”<sup>2</sup> board chair of Meadville Lombard Theological School, one of only two Unitarian Universalist seminaries in the country, and as Moderator of the UUA from 1993-2001. In 2006, she and her husband Jerry jointly received the Award for Distinguished Service to the Cause of Unitarian Universalism.

She preached in over 100 congregations. I haven’t even come close to preaching 100 times, much less in 100 different congregations. She was a prophetic voice for our movement. And when prophetic voices speak we need to recognize them and listen.

**[NEW SLIDE: Edward S. Herman]**

In an age where news sources and media organizations are becoming increasingly less concerned with objectivity, and more interested in presenting commentary from a partisan perspective, it seems an especially difficult loss to say goodbye to media critic Edward S. Herman. Best known

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/get-involved/where/clf>

for co-authoring the book *Manufacturing Consent* with Noam Chomsky, Herman wrote a number of books and articles that exposed the corrupt ways in which mass media is used as propaganda tools to promote nationalism and militarism, in the U.S. and abroad. His experience as an economist and a professor of finance at the Wharton School of Business gave him a thorough understanding of corporate power structures and the banking industry, which he used to criticize corrupt U.S. foreign policy. He also drew critical attention to the hypocritical ways that U.S. mass media covers human rights offenses differently when committed by our global allies than when committed by our enemies.

Herman produced most of his hard-hitting political and media criticism in the 80's and 90s. And now, in an era where the term "fake news" has become cliché, we will miss his prophetic voice. I like to think of Ed Herman as the hipster of calling out fake news: he was doing it way before it was cool.

### **[NEW SLIDE: Dick Gregory]**

Another person who was not afraid to speak truth to power was civil rights activist and comedian Dick Gregory. His comedy and his activism went hand-in-hand. He participated in the 1963 March on Washington, and just prior to the March, he used humor as he led an attempt to integrate a "whites only" restaurant. As he tells it: "We tried to integrate a restaurant, and they said, 'We don't serve colored folk here,' and I said, 'Well, I don't eat colored folk nowhere. Bring me some pork chops.'"<sup>3</sup>

He was a master at using humor to disarm, but he was not afraid to be direct. At one point, Gregory called the U.S. "the number-one most racist system on the planet."<sup>4</sup>

To try to change that system, he ran for office: in 1967, he ran for mayor of Chicago, and in 1968, he ran for President of the United States. Although he didn't win either campaign, he did receive nearly 50,000 votes in his presidential bid.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/08/19/544769294/dick-gregory-comedian-and-civil-rights-activist-dies-at-84>

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Gregory remained committed to activism throughout his life, using everything from hunger strikes to stand-up comedy to draw attention to, and combat, racism and sexism.

Dick Gregory reminds us that not all prophetic voices sound the same; and that sometimes, prophetic voices even tell jokes.