



# *It happened at Syracuse*



**A 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE:**  
*Celebrating the Birth and Growth of Unitarian Universalism*

**October 30-31, 2009, Syracuse, NY**

<http://www.sld.uua.org/50thAnniversary/50thanniversary.html>

## **PROFILES OF FEATURE SPEAKERS**

**Rev. Dr. David E. Bumbaugh** began his lifelong engagement with liberal religion in 1957 when, as a junior at Wilmington College of Ohio, he was invited to serve the First Universalist Church of Blanchester, a small congregation in a nearby town. As David tells the story, at the time he had heard nothing of Universalism and, though he has heard of Unitarianism, he thought it had died along with Emerson. His lack of knowledge notwithstanding, David accepted the invitation and immediately found himself plunged into the conversation surrounding the imminent prospect of merger of American Unitarian Association (AUA) and the Universalist Church of America (UCA). In 1959 he was called to serve the Universalist church in Lyons, Ohio. As a delegate from this congregation he participated in the “1959 Conference at Syracuse” where delegates from the AUA and UCA adopted the “Plan for Consolidation” that resulted in creation of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) two years later in May, 1961. David campaigned for merger during the plebiscite in congregations that immediately followed the Syracuse Conference but mourned the demise of the UCA. He joined the faculty of Meadville Lombard Seminary in 1999 after four decades plus of experience in parish ministry serving rural, urban, and suburban congregations. David also has wide ranging experience in public ministry and taught at Drew Theological Seminary before joining the Meadville Lombard faculty. His publications include *The Education of God* (1994), and *Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History* (2000).

**Rev. Dr. Richard S Gilbert** is a born Universalist from Canandaigua, NY who taught Sunday school at the First Universalist Church of Bristol and got a lay preaching license while still in high school. After high school he attended St. Lawrence University where he received a B.S. in 1958 (psychology) and a M.Div. degree in 1961 with certification in religious education. He also received a D.Min. degree from Colgate Rochester Divinity School and honorary doctorates from St. Lawrence, Meadville Lombard Seminary and Starr King School for the Ministry. As an “interested” theology student at St. Lawrence he traveled to the “1959 Conference at Syracuse” to observe the proceedings. When quizzed about his memory of the conference he admits to not having been entirely focused on the ecclesiological debate. The source of his distraction was Joyce Ann Timmerman who he met in a back pew of the First Universalist Society of Syracuse (Now First UU). As these things sometime go, the two fell in love, married, and remain life partners fifty years later. Dick has taught at Colgate Rochester Crozer, Starr King, and Meadville Lombard. He “retired” from parish ministry in June 2005 after serving 44 years at UU congregations in Cleveland, OH; Golden, CO; Ithaca, NY; and the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY. He has served on too many denominational boards and committees to list here. The equally numerous list of awards he has received for distinguished service include the Angus H. MacLean Award in Religious Education (1984) and the Holmes-Weatherly Award of the UUA for faith-based social justice work (1995). His publications include *Building Your Own Theology*, a three volume adult religious education series, (2000) and *The Prophetic Imperative: Social Gospel in Theory and Practice* (1980, Rev. 2000). Dick is currently serving as the part-time Social Justice Coordinator for the St. Lawrence District. He also does guest preaching, conducts social justice workshops, and is working on books about the religious life of Susan B. Anthony and a history and philosophy of UU religious education.



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**Rev. Dr. David B. Parke** was born in Buffalo, New York. He received an A.B. from Antioch College (1952), a B.Div. from Meadville/Lombard Seminary (1955), and a PhD from Boston University (1965). In the fall of 1952, while a graduate student at University of Chicago (Meadville/Lombard), he was inspired by the publication of the second volume of Earl Morse Wilbur's *History of Unitarianism: in Transylvania, England, and America* to undertake a project of identifying and publishing the original text behind Wilbur's narrative prose. This project was completed in the fall of 1956 and was published by Beacon Press in 1957 as *The Epic of Unitarianism: Original Writings from the History of Liberal Religion*. In the forward to the 1985 edition David writes: "Aware of the formative power of the power of the Hebrew prophets in the development of Israel, and of the gospels in the development of Christianity, I decided to search out and publish the formative documents of Unitarian and Universalist history as an extended footnote, as it were, to Wilbur's work." The fact that *The Epic of Unitarianism* has been in continuous publication for over 50 years is testament to the formative power of this work. David was ordained as a Unitarian minister in 1956, while serving the Peterborough Unitarian Universalist Church (NH). In 1959 he made his way from Peterborough to the "1959 Conference at Syracuse" as a member of the Unitarian delegation and cast his vote in favor of the "Plan for Consolidation." He reports that at the time of consolidation he viewed the process as more of an administrative matter rather than an issue of substantive theological significance. In addition to serving congregations in Germantown and Reading, PA and in Brewster, MA; David was a professor at the Theological School of St. Lawrence University; founder and first president of Monadnock Community College in New Hampshire; founder and editor of *Kairos*, an independent quarterly of liberal religion from 1975 to 1983; and the editor-in-chief of *Unitarian Universalist World*.

**Rev. Dr. Elizabeth M. Strong** is a third generation Universalist who began teaching Sunday school at the Old Stone Universalist church in Schuyler Lake, NY when she was in the eighth grade. Liz was too young to participate in the "1959 Conference at Syracuse;" but she vividly remembers sitting at the kitchen table and listening to her mother talk of her fears about merger and how Universalists risked losing their voice, their face, and their money if consolidation was approved. Keeping the heritage of Universalism alive and advancing the development of liberal religious education grew into lifelong passions. Liz became a professional religious educator and was named Director of Religious Education for First Unitarian of Rochester, NY, in 1978. She was ordained a Minister of Religious Education there in 1983. She served as Minister of Religious Education at MMUUS from 1988 until 2001, and received her Doctor of Divinity degree from Meadville Lombard in 2000 where she also served on the Board of Trustees. Liz is currently serving as the quarter-time interim minister for the Unitarian Church of Ashby, MA. She is a credentialed supervisor for UU ministry students as they go through their field education placements, a mentor for the Liberal Religious Education Directors Association, and a tireless advocate in advancing the cause of lifespan faith development. Her publications include *Remember Universalism into Life: A study guide for the Universalist Heritage*, with Raymond Nasemann (1995) and *The Larger Message: Universalist Religious Education's Response to Theological and Cultural Challenges, 1790 to 1930* (2004).

To download the registration brochure and read more about "What Happened at Syracuse" go to the conference website at:

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