

Citation for Frank Edson Robertson
Degree of Doctor of Divinity, honoris causa
Commencement Ceremony, June 4, 2006

Rev. Frank Edson Robertson, we honor you today as an outstanding Unitarian Universalist minister, as a faithful religious educator, as an exceptional leader in many and sundry public institutions, and finally as a courageous pioneer of human rights.

Born in Greenfield, Massachusetts, you received your education at the University of Massachusetts graduating with a degree in chemical engineering. And then perceiving a divine call beyond the religion of formulas and numbers, you went on to the Theological School of St. Lawrence University where you received both your Master of Divinity degree and a certification in Religious Education. After ordination in 1962 at the Grace Universalist Church of Lowell, Massachusetts, you went on to serve churches in Barnveld, New York; Shelter Rock, New York; Paramus, New Jersey; Washington, D.C.; Santa Barbara, California; and finally Evanston, Illinois, where you were named a Minister Emeritus upon your retirement in 1998. Except for your first parish, all of these have been as a Minister of Religious Education.

As a religious educator you have helped shape significant curriculum for our movement, such as ones on UU culture and world religions. You served as well on the board of LREDA and the Unitarian Universalist Association. You have also been a champion of holistic education. You have written, “We have to be advocates for the total child. We have to dismantle the prejudice against children who might have needs other than a highly structured Sunday morning.” For your long career of loving, nurturing and molding our Unitarian Universalist youth you received in 1998 the Angus H. MacLean Award for excellence in religious education.

As a dedicated leader in many and sundry public institutions, you founded and now chair the UU Religious Education History Group because you recognized that much of the UU history of our Sunday Schools and other religious education bodies has been scattered and may be irretrievably lost unless collected and saved; you have chaired the 400th Anniversary Celebration Committee of your current church home, the First Parish of Plymouth, Massachusetts; additionally you have served on the boards of the St. Lawrence Foundation, and US Chapter of the International Association of Religious Freedom as well as an Elder of the Massachusetts Society of Mayflower Descendants.

Finally for almost all of your professional life in ministry you have been a courageous pioneer for the cause of human rights. Despite being told by some associates in seminary that there

was no place in the ministry for homosexuals, you came out as early as 1971 when you went to All Souls Church in Washington, DC, where you had been open and honest with them in their search process about your sexual orientation, becoming probably the first religious educator to be hired as an openly gay person in such a ministerial position. You have testified that such a bold and brave move was possible not only because of the perhaps naïve idealism of those festive beginning days of gay liberation, but also because of the love and support you received from your colleagues in the association of religious educators, most of whom were women.

For the past thirty-five years you have continued the struggle for equal rights, including being a founding member and now archivist for Interweave, the Unitarian Universalist organization for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, and more recently serving on the advisory committee of the LGBT Religious Archive Network, as well as taking a key role in the drive to establish the Office of Gay Concerns within the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1973 and then actually to fund it in 1974. In 1998 you received the Mark DeWolfe Award for your commitment and exemplary contributions to improving and honoring the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Today the Meadville Lombard Theological School is proud and honored to bestow upon you the degree of doctor of divinity in our recognition of your fabulous life that helped bring our denomination out of a benighted closet of discrimination into the bright daylight of freedom for all people to be all they are at their very depths, and to become and do all they can to enhance divine truth and universal love. May those in the world both religious and secular, who currently piously practice prejudice by spewing bigotry they hypocritically call moral values, be shamed and then inspired by your life of holy service.