



Citation

Susan Frederick Gray

Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*

Unitarian Universalism is in a time of great upheaval, in fact you could say the same about our larger world. Each day, we understand better that our lives are woven into a complex system, nestled in both a multiplicity of realities and, at the same time, simple interactions. Critical thinkers and observers across the academy note that the health of the smallest cell is the foundation for the healing of our species and our world.

It is in this emergent context of simple interactions shifting major systems that The Reverend Susan Frederick Gray assumed the office of president of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. Of late the Association is noticing root problems in our congregations that reveal unhealthy patterns of thinking and behavior. Our theories of knowledge, social and group interactions – even the values assigned to particular people– are grossly inadequate for our times.

Our Unitarian Universalist people were yearning for a way out of these complexities, and Susan Frederick Gray, the biologist, the companion of justice, the minister for an organizational system seeking healthy alternatives answered our call for leadership.

From the frontlines of Justice GA that focused our attention on immigrant injustice to confronting white supremacist in Charlottesville Virginia, Rev. Frederick Gray called us out of our silos of individuality and intellectual navel-gazing, and led us in a practice of re-shaping our hearts and bodies for the work of justice and compassion.

As a denomination that often believes their physical bodies are useful only to get their heads from one organizational meeting to the next, Rev. Susan's vision of what's possible has been a *challenge* to our system. Yet her commitments to a prophetic, muscular-yet-compassionate vision requires that we explore persistently how our present frames lead us down paths that replicate unhealthy patterns.

Angus MacLean offers that our methods say a great deal about what we believe. Rev. Gray has used the power of her presidential pulpit to interrupt paternalistic and divisive patterns across the denomination, from invigorating relationships with professional religious organizations, to funding initiatives that support historically marginalized spiritual communities, to progressive hiring practices that humanize our values. As one of two denominational seminaries, we are thrilled that she opened the door to a process of integrity that allows the UUA to act in good faith with our two UU schools for theological education.

We honor this president because she has harnessed her considerable spiritual depth and pastoral skills for the work of healing an organization that can feel bereft in a chaotic world. We honor this person - filled with audacious hope - because she models how to believe in the potential of a Unitarian Universalism that does not yet exist. We honor this minister who's inclusive vision for collective spiritual

depth shines most brightly during seasons of doubt, anxiety and gracelessness. We honor our leader who collaborates into existence - new ways of thinking, feeling and being that starve the dailyness of business as usual, in search of a world where all are free, reconciled, and loved.

Mr. President, I present the Rev. Susan Frederick Gray for the degree of Doctor of Divinity, *honorius causa*.

Mark A. Hicks, Ph.D.
Angus MacLean Professor of Religious Education
Director, The Fahs Collaborative Laboratory for Innovation in Faith Formation