

4005 Plenary IV Sunday 12:30 - 4:00 p.m.

Planning Committee Sponsored

Presentation of Distinguished Service to Unitarian Universalism Award to Natalie Webber Gulbrandsen
Rev. William G. Sinkford

Devoted Unitarian Universalist, volunteer *extraordinaire*, champion of peace and women's rights, promoter of international religious cooperation and speaker of her own mind, Natalie Webber Gulbrandsen has for sixty years provided our movement with her uncompromising loyalty, critical wisdom and constant service.

Raised by a Catholic mother and Baptist father, she joined the Unitarian Church shortly after her graduation from Bates College. Along with her beloved late husband, Dr. Melvin Gulbrandsen, Natalie held virtually every position in her local congregation, the Unitarian Universalist Society of Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts, and raised five children, all of whom still consider themselves Unitarian Universalists.

But Natalie Gulbrandsen's engagement with our movement was not to be limited to the local scene. Over the years she has served the larger Association in numerous capacities, including on the UUA Commission on Appraisal, the Council on Church Staff Finances, the Selma Memorial Committee and the Board of the Church of the Larger Fellowship. For fourteen years she provided leadership to the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation, filling terms as its Treasurer and President. And in 1985 she was elected Moderator of the Unitarian Universalist Association, a position she held until 1993. To all these uncompensated posts she brought humor, insight and common sense, a fierce dedication to her religious values coupled with the blandishments of her customarily generous heart.

Among the causes always dear to that heart has been international cooperation and Natalie has journeyed to more than twenty countries in its pursuit.. Whether it be her having hosted at least fifty foreign exchange students from over thirty nations, her leadership of the global peace organization, Choose Peace, her co-authorship of the Partner Church initiative or her three years as President of the International Association for Religious Freedom, Natalie Gulbrandsen has always modeled the virtues of a global citizen.

Natalie has been described as a "classic New England woman" and to the extent that that description connotes high standards and an aversion to untoward language, it is accurate. The most profane expression that has ever crossed her lips is the word "Godfrey!" but it has crossed them frequently. And yet, "classic" though she may be, she was not too "classic" to be arrested in an act of civil disobedience in protest of nuclear testing in Nevada, to stand half-clothed under a near-freezing waterfall in a Shinto purification ceremony in Japan, to go skinny dipping every summer morning at her seasonal home on Moose Pond in Maine or to pose on a Harley Davidson motorcycle for her eightieth birthday.

Despite her occasional failings-she frequently requires that jokes be explained to her and, according to her children, "has always been a great conversationalist, even when no one is around"-Dr. Gulbrandsen (who holds honorary doctorates from her alma mater, Bates College, and from Meadville/Lombard Theological School) has exemplified lay leadership at its finest. She is respected around the world, honored throughout the Association and loved profoundly by her many friends and large family. For all these reasons it is the Unitarian Universalist Association's great privilege to present the 2002 Award for Distinguished Service to the Cause of Unitarian Universalism to Natalie Webber Gulbrandsen.