

ALL SOULS *at 200+*

THE ALL SOULS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Fall 2026, Vol.4, Issue N° 1

The All Souls Historical Society

“The past matters because the future matters—
history is as much about the future as it is about the past.”

—Ann Gronningsater

Editor: Bill Bechman, President; Production Editor: James E. Moskin, Art & Artifacts Chair

MARY-ELLA HOLST (1934–2026)

—by Laura Pedersen

Mary-Ella Holst was your favorite grandmother, educator and civil rights leader all rolled into one. I'll work backward. As a self-described 'institutionalist,' she was all about founding and/or growing entities that would help people, especially children and families. Fortunately, All Souls was high on her list, particularly the Women's Alliance, and our Religious Education program, which she oversaw for many years.

So was the Booker T. Washington Learning Center, a startup with our sister church in East Harlem, devoted to helping educate and keep safe disadvantaged children in an area significantly lacking in public services. Mary-Ella went to heroic lengths to help individual youngsters, which included going to their schoolteachers and principals, and advocating for them, and locating the support they needed whether in their community or through the All Souls congregation.

As an educator, Mary-Ella made sure there was a lesson in everything we did (whether it was obvious or not) that people could carry forward in their lives. For instance, the BTWLC children were allowed to request a specific holiday gift, and we made our best attempts to procure their first or second choices. The idea was that in life they were supposed to try and articulate what they wanted from those in charge.

Mary-Ella was also careful to always include the stories of women and minorities when she was teaching any subject, which has ensured that the important history of women at All Souls continues to be passed on to future generations. Far be it from Mary-Ella to believe that women should be defined by their prowess in the kitchen, but she made delicious baked goods, which she regularly shared with all of us grateful consumers at the BTWLC and All Souls, and always led the charge when it came to decorating cupcakes or planning an ice cream sundae party.

Many of the BTWLC 'children' are now in their thirties with kids of their own, and they regularly call me with wonderful memories from those years. Mary-Ella is

greatly missed but her legacy carries on, even if her strawberry scone recipe does not.

The Memorial Service for Mary-Ella will be on October 18th, 2026, at 2:00PM at All Souls, with the Rev. Pamela Patton officiating.



Mary-Ella serving ice-cream sundaes at the Booker T. Washington Learning Center

REVEREND KATHLEEN RETURNS!

We are thrilled to welcome back the Rev. Kathleen Rolenz. She was our Bridge Minister for the six months from January, 2025 to June, 2025.

And now, a year later, she has returned to be our Interim Senior Minister. During her previous six months with us, she had a major impact on our congregation. This was especially true for the Historical Society. She single-handedly—well we helped a little—pitched and purged the mess that had been our Archives Room. We are eager to see and to experience what we will do together now. Welcome Back, Rev. Kathleen!



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THE LAST SEVEN YEARS

—by Bill Bechman

On November 8th, we will celebrate our 207th Anniversary as a congregation. Back in 2019, we celebrated our 200th Anniversary with Bicentennial festivities and we published a book, *All Souls at 200*. There was plenty of material in the Archives to use to research for that book.

Ironically, since 2019, our Archives haven't received as many submissions and are therefore less complete for a variety of reasons. We've decided now to concentrate on the last seven years and to encourage people to share recollections to build our recent Archives. What's happened since 2019 to us as individuals, to our congregation, to our city, to our world?

Please create and send essays, videos, photos—anything you choose to describe experiences of the last seven years. Send your recollections to history@allsoulsnyc.org. We will create a montage for the Archives that describes our last seven years: 2019 to 2026, so future researchers will find an array of descriptions of our experiences.

STORIES WITH SOUL, UNMUTED

—by Tim Kelley, Stories with Soul Coordinator

Do you enjoy hearing stories read aloud and discussing them? If so, there is—and has been since 1993—a group for you at All Souls. It meets on Wednesdays at 6:45PM, with no 'homework' or reservations required. It's mostly on Zoom, but still convenes (except during construction in summer 2026) in person at the church on each month's final Wednesday. It's a great way to make friends, encounter the work of authors both beloved and unfamiliar, and hear oneself utter surprising literary insights.

What has STORIES WITH SOUL been up to since 2020, when it was silenced (for just two weeks!) by the pandemic? some key events are described below:

March 4, 2020: Already there'd been much talk of the dangerous new illness that had sweeping the nation. Perhaps tempting the gods, March host Tim Kelley declared at the group's meeting in the Ware Room that STORIES WITH SOUL had gathered there, "Coronavirus be damned!"

March 11 and 18, 2020: STORIES WITH SOUL meetings were cancelled due to the virus.

March 25, 2020: Given the need to transition to a new technology in the face of the pandemic, Coordinator Steve Michelman yielded that position to longtime Co-coordinator Teresa Brooks, who worked with Associate Minister Audette Fulbright to get group meetings started on Zoom. ("You are keeping it alive," a grateful Steve said to Teresa.) That Wednesday, an on-screen audience of 30 people heard Dixie Goss read William Trevor's story "Good News."

April 29, 2020: All STORIES WITH SOUL readers deserve to be celebrated, but let's face it—we haven't all been on Broadway and in the movies. Actress Dana Ivey of our congregation has. She's also read at STORIES 18 times, and this date was the first of her 10 readings on Zoom so far, featuring stories by Elizabeth Strout, R. T. Smith, Graham Swift, Margaret Atwood, Flannery O'Connor, Ellen Gilchrist, Yiyun Li, Rivka Galchen, Kate Walbert, and Yiyun Li again.

February 12, 2021: A complaint to a minister from a STORIES WITH SOUL reader about an attendee's Zoom-session comment that was thought to be insensitive to an ethnic group understandably brought an inquiry to group leaders from one of the ministers about what was said that Wednesday. The following week—in a reflection of a possible chilling effect from that inquiry—a reader switched out the story he had planned to read after deciding it was 'inappropriate.' Discussing the matter, several STORIES WITH SOUL members agreed that our group's purpose was to enjoy literature, not to convey Unitarian values. Grateful as we were to be an All Souls program, we felt that STORIES WITH SOUL works best when it is independent of All Souls staff. We didn't wish to narrow the range of stories we hear only to those that embody prescribed attitudes, but rather to enjoy and learn from a wide variety of stories with their warts-and-all reflection of life. However, it is also an important part of our discussions to see short stories in their historical context and to call out instances when, intentionally or not, characterizations or terminology in those stories disrespect any group of human beings.

March 19, 2021: Steve Michelman, longtime STORIES WITH SOUL coordinator, passed away at 90 in the Jewish Home on West 106th Street.

Spring 2021: Coordinator Teresa Brooks yielded the reins to Co-coordinators Neil Osborne and Tim Kelley.

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June 2, 2021: STORIES WITH SOUL remembered Steve Michelman with an 'encore performance.' Sharing the screen on Zoom, the video (thanks, Carlton Bright!) of Steve's April 27, 2005 reading of Stephen Vincent Benét's "The Devil and Daniel Webster," when Kim Calder hosted. Peak attendance that evening: 33.

September 8, 2021: STORIES WITH SOUL returned to the Ware Room—technically, because Bill Bechman was located there as he read "A Sense of Shelter" by John Updike for the Zoom-gathered group.

September 22, 2021: In what was billed as an expanded session of STORIES WITH SOUL, in-person attendees in Reidy-Friendship Hall saw and heard Laura Pedersen's new play *Community Service*, featuring David Rockefeller Jr. and Paula Ewin. It was a hit, not least because it presented real live people rather than Zoom rectangles.

May 11, 2022: In the Ware Room and on Zoom, Tim Kelley read Maria Reva's story "Letter of Apology" to 11 people present in person and 16 on Zoom. There were technical problems, and two different laptops failed. Lois Coleman came to the rescue by lending her smartphone, from which Zoomers got a good half-hour's view of Kelley's chin, but also heard the story—or at least most of it.

September 2022: STORIES WITH SOUL attempted to return full-time to in-person meetings with a Zoom connection, despite continuing challenges with audibility on this hybrid connection. Since the Ware Room was unavailable, these meetings took place downstairs in either the Forrest Church Gallery or Reidy-Friendship Hall. On the 7th, Karen Steele read "A New Life" by Mary Ward Brown (12 in person, 11 on Zoom); on the 14th, Pamela Patton read "The Nose" by Nikolai Gogol (6 in person, 28 on Zoom); on the 21st, Dixie Goss read "Detective Dog" by Gish Jen (9 in person, 14 on Zoom); and on the 28th, psychiatrist, lawyer and prize-winning fiction writer Jacob Appel read his own short story "Coulrophobia" (10 in person, 13 on Zoom). (Jacob also gave out free copies of the book!) After this, STORIES retreated from the attempt to hold all meetings in person and settled into a pattern in which all Wednesdays were Zoom-only except for each month's final Wednesday, which combined in-person and Zoom. Eventually our in-person sessions returned to a renovated and drastically redesigned Ware Room, minus the comfy old couches and lamps.

November 25, 2022: Minister Emeritus, author, participant in the historic 1965 Selma, Alabama Civil

Rights march and longtime STORIES WITH SOUL regular, Richard Leonard passed away at 95.

March 29, 2023: STORIES WITH SOUL attendees got a fascinating window on literary history as renowned fiction author Hilma Wolitzer, age 93, was present on the Zoom for Jennifer Vermont-Davis's reading of her funny story, "Overtime." The author had also been with us on an earlier occasion, on November 20, 2021 when Dixie Goss read her "The Great Escape." But this time, still very spry and talkative, she shared extensive thoughts in a lengthy discussion about her writing, her methods and her literary goals. It has been the group's custom on Zoom to turn off 'Record' during the post-reading discussion so that people might feel they could comment without an ill-considered word inadvertently living on forever in a recording. But on this occasion, given the enduring literary interest of this writer's recollections and views, 'Record' was turned back on to capture some of the conversation so that it would not be lost.

November 29, 2023: STORIES WITH SOUL celebrated its 30th anniversary with a party in the now-transformed Ware Room. To mark the occasion, we had two readers who were, respectively, the third and fourth readers ever at STORIES in early 1994. (They read on the fifth and sixth weeks, the discrepancy explained by the fact that for the group's first four meetings, founder Warren Bryan read three times.) Miles Chapin read "Excepting Mrs. Penherby" by Saki (H. H. Munro), and Marilynn Scott Murphy read "Twelve Angry New Yorkers" by All Souls' own Laura Pedersen.

December 2, 2024: Frank Patton, longtime member, 30-time reader and the archivist who kept the record by which we knew what stories were read by whom (and when) over our 33-year history, died at 93. He was survived by his wife Rose Patton, also an indispensably central STORIES WITH SOUL participant for many years, who by that time, was no longer able to attend.

June 4, 2025: Following in the footsteps of Forrest Church, David Robb, Galen Guengerich, Jan Carlson-Bull, Richard Leonard, Cheryl Walker, Lissa Gundlach, Melaney Mashburn, Ana Levy-Lyons, Pamela Patton, Audette Fulbright, Gretchen Gabrielson, Tracy Sprowls and other All Souls ministers and staffers, Target Minister the Rev. Kathleen Rolenz read for STORIES. Her selection was "Torch Song" by John Cheever.

November 9, 2025: STORIES WITH SOUL members manned a booth on Anniversary Sunday.

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December 21, 2025: According to the new pattern in which All Souls groups take turns hosting Coffee Hour, STORIES WITH SOUL played host, with goodies memorably provided by Terry Manzella, Anne Hollyday and Tim Kelley. In a contest that asks people to identify a story's title and author by its first line alone, Linda Moskin was the winner, correctly identifying Raymond Carver's "Cathedral." (Kudos, too, to Julie Brannan, who identified the first line of John Cheever's "The Enormous Radio" as Cheever's work without consulting her phone.)



April 1, 2026: No April Foolin', this was the 73rd reading at STORIES WITH SOUL by Neil Osborne, our all-time champion most-frequent reader. On this occasion, he read "Flower Children" by Maxine Swann. (Neil's first post-pandemic-shutdown reading, his 59th, was Jamie Cameron's "The Nicht Afore Christmas," read on December 23, 2020.)

May 24, 2026: STORIES WITH SOUL again hosted Coffee Hour at All Souls, with Susan Linden, Karen Steele and Thomas Towell ably representing the group and explaining its procedure.



June 10, 2026: Continuing the tradition, Interim Senior Minister, the Rev. Dr. Elaine Peresluha, read for STORIES on Zoom. Her story was "Weight" by Margaret Atwood.

June 17, 2026: In a STORIES WITH SOUL first, multiple readers voiced the different parts in a dialogue-rich story, J. D. Salinger's "Just Before the War with the Eskimos." Nina Kolman read the part of Ginnie, while Brian Kelley voiced Franklin, Willard Knox was Eric, Liz Pressman was Selena and Tim Kelley narrated.

We fondly remember, in alphabetical order, these attendees lost since the start of 2020: **Judy Chang, Syd Golston, Mary-Ella Holst, Paul Lenner, Richard Leonard, Betty McCollum, Steve Michelman, Marilyn Scott Murphy, Frank Patton, and Bob Swain.**

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2026 REVIEWED

—by Karen Steele

General Assembly 2026 was mostly virtual, with in-person programming available throughout in Louisville, KY, and, during the final weekend, at satellite sites at Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregations across the country. The GA 2026 schedule was divided into three segments:

- 1) Opening and Business sessions: June 14–16;
- 2) On demand and live online meetings/presentations June 17–18, and
- 3) Featured speakers, Meet the Moment Programming, Closing Worship June 19–21.

All Souls had a small turnout this year: seven delegates applied and were approved: Robert Dottin, Malinda Foy, Mary Geissman, Adriana Klinger, Jim Moskin, Karen Steele, and Arelis Torres. The group met twice before GA began. Karen attended the June 19-21 in-person sessions at the Westport, CT UU congregation.

Business and programs

For an overview of the Business sessions, see: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/uua-ga-business-session-together-everywhere>. Note also the two workshops during this segment which continued the conversation around the Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA's) current Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI), "[Abolition, Transformation, and Faith Formation](#)," which was adopted during GA 2025. All Souls will need to engage in this study during the coming year, as a draft Statement of Conscience will be written in the fall, discussed and then voted on at GA 2027.

Central topic: *How do we meet the moment we are in?*

The Meet the Moment sessions led by UUA staff addressed how our shared values can guide our responses to urgent needs and opportunities. At this moment, UU membership and pledge base are shrinking, but there is also a strong sense of community and mission. Liberal institutions, including the UUA, are under attack—our values are being criminalized—and leaders are overwhelmed. The UUA can't take the lead on all the issues, but is showing up (in Minneapolis, for example), has joined a lawsuit with 27 faith groups to protect sanctuary, and joined with eleven heads of faith in a statement on gender. Our calling is both individual and communal. The need to respond urgently is coming at an unsustainable pace, so it is important to maintain an effective infrastructure, and to collaborate with those who

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share our values. Question: Who controls the narrative of what being faithful means? For more description of presentations during the latter part of GA, see UU World: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/uua-ga-programming-session-together-everywhere>.

Some programs of note, all live online:

- The Coalition of UU State Action Networks (CUUSAN) held a conference June 17. New York UU Justice (NYUJ) is our state action network and was a driving force in advocacy for the Medical Aid in Dying Act passed in winter 2026 and in effect as of August 5.
- The Minneapolis Moment: Lessons in Multifaith Organizing—Facilitated by Steering Committee members from Multifaith Anti-Racism, Change, & Healing.
- UU Witness Delegation: Meeting the Palestine Solidarity Moment—Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East (UUJME).
- Courage and Care: A Conversation with the Rev. Liz Walker and the Rev. Dr. Beth Johnson—in a time marked by disruption and possibility, this conversation invites reflection on how communities of faith respond with courage, care, and conviction.
- The Ware Lecture: “The [Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde](#), the first woman elected as the Episcopal Bishop of Washington, DC said, ‘In the work of social justice and inclusion, UUs are almost always among the first.’” (quotation from UU World). In her lecture and in the Q & A afterward with UUA President the Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt, Rev. Budde addressed calls from Episcopalian parishioners (and from UUs) for her to speak out on the genocide in Gaza by saying she chose not to take that front line role.

GA 2026 closed with a worship service led by the Rev. Jen Youngsun Ryu. GA 2027 will be both in person and online in San José, CA, June 23–27, 2027. We look forward to inviting our members to represent us as GA delegates next summer.



WHERE DID THE TIME GO?

—by Bill Bechman

Where did the time go? Or more specifically, the precious 1821 Clock that was most recently in the Forrest Church Gallery. This clock dates back to 1821, two years after our congregation was established, and it was mounted in the Sanctuary of our first church. It then moved to our second and then to our third churches. Many of us remember when it was in our current sanctuary, above the double doors into the vestibule. When the new pipe organ was installed and the choir loft was reconfigured, there was no longer a place for it in our sanctuary.

It was moved downstairs to Reidy-Friendship Hall, where it looked great mounted above the Reidy dedicatory plaque. It looked good, but it kept getting hit by basketballs. It's been in the Forrest Church Gallery for the past few years. Now, it's been moved to Rev. Kathleen's office temporarily for safe keeping until a permanent location can be determined. The 1821 clock is our oldest relic. The clock face and hands are original. At some point it was electrified, and the electric mechanism has been changed several times. It's our hope that it can be prominently re-mounted by Anniversary Sunday.



The 1821 clock held by Kwang Hing Yuen after repair

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ACCESSING THE ALL SOULS ARCHIVES

The All Souls Archives comprises two parts:

- The physical archives at the top of Wiggin House housing a variety of historical artifacts and books mostly by ministers and members plus certain records deemed inappropriate for transfer to the archives at the Meadville Lombard Theological School outside of Chicago.
- The Archives at Meadville Lombard comprising 47 boxes of files and records (including early handwritten documents such as minutes from 1821) that were taken from All Souls and are being digitized over time plus the files already digitized and the newer records at All Souls that are already digital and are being periodically transferred to Meadville Lombard. The Meadville Lombard collection comprises the largest congregational archives that they have and is now named after All Souls' late longtime Archivist Lorraine Allen.

Both parts of our Archives can be accessed by those interested or doing research on our church. The Archives in Wiggin House are currently less available while work is being done on the adjacent roof, but contact members of the Historical Society leadership team to make appointments or get help finding things. Access is via the elevator to the Roof level and walking through the stairwell door (that can lock behind you) up a flight of stairs to a locked door containing the Archives. Because of this last flight of stairs, the Archives are not ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessible! Because of locked doors, a member of staff or the Historical Society leadership team must be with you.

In 2014, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) established the UUA Congregational Records collection

at the Unitarian-Universalist seminary, the Meadville Lombard Theological School. Accessing the Lorraine-Allen Archives at Meadville Lombard is easy and can be done from your computer. The filing and search systems use *Jstor*, but should be free (it's not necessary to sign up for, subscribe to or log into *Jstor*). The system for accessing the Archives from the Meadville Lombard website is a bit convoluted, but a shortcut can be found on the Historical Society website www.allsoulsnychistory.org.

It is:

jstor.org/site/meadville/all-souls.

Alternatively:

collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/mls_allsouls.

These two links do not take one to exactly the same place and the search systems are a bit different, but either will get you to the same information. See also the explanation on the Historical Society website:

<https://www.allsoulsnychistory.org/archives>.

We would also like members, friends and groups at All Souls to submit pertinent materials to the Archives.

The Archives can receive materials for submission at Archives@allsoulsnyc.org. We would like All Souls groups (attention group leaders!) to add this e-mail address to their e-mail lists, so that materials sent out to their members will also automatically go to the Archives.

Materials submitted in this way will be sorted into various categories as recommended by Meadville's archival staff and combined with other official materials collected by the church office and will then be submitted on a regular basis to Meadville Lombard.



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EVENTS

- September 11 **High Holy Days:** Rosh Hashanah—
7:00PM the Sanctuary
- September 13 **Opening Sunday**
Welcoming the Rev. Kathleen Rolenz
back to the All Souls pulpit
11:15AM the Sanctuary
- September 15 **Welcome Back Party** hosted by the
Women's Alliance, co-sponsored by
the Laymen's League, AQS (All Queer
Souls), and the Historical Society
7:00PM–9:00PM Reidy-Friendship Hall
- September 27 **Musica Viva Concert**
5:00PM the Sanctuary
- October 23 **Chelsea Gallery Tour** with Dr. Rafael
Risemberg hosted by the League and the
Women's Alliance (\$20 fee, plus lunch)
11:30am–1:00pm
Register with Tom Blum
(tblum@yahoo.com)
- November 8 **Anniversary Sunday**
Adult Ed with Laura Pedersen:
*Conscience Over Creed: How
Unitarianism Shaped US Democracy*
10:00AM
Service by the Rev. Kathleen Rolenz
11:15AM the Sanctuary
Festive Coffee Hour (after Service)



HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS & COMMITTEES

- President: Bill Bechman
- Vice President: (vacant)
- Treasurer: Alynne Wesson
- Secretary: (vacant)

COMMITTEES:

- Archives: Bill Bechman
- Art & Artifacts: James Moskin
- Garden: Tom Blum
- Nominating Committee: Alynne Wesson
- Website: Lois Coleman
- Accessible Congregation: Barbara Silverstone
- Welcoming Congregation: Christian Huygen

