



Rosemary Matson, 1958 and 2008.

## **Rosemary Matson (1917-2014)**

Rosemary Matson--feminist, humanist, Unitarian Universalist leader, champion of human rights, civil liberties and international peace--died September 27, 2014, at her home in Carmel Valley, California. She was 97.

A memorial gathering will be held on Saturday, October 25, 2014, at 2 pm at the Community Church of the Monterey Peninsula, 4590 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel.

Born September 20, 1917, in Geneva, Iowa, Rosemary grew up in Geneva and Fort Dodge, Iowa, where she graduated from high school in 1936. In the late 1930s she attended Omaha University (now the University of Nebraska Omaha) and the University of California at Berkeley. While a student at Berkeley she had her first experience as an activist, becoming an organizer for the Culinary Workers Union and joining a strike for higher wages for waitresses.

During the early 1940s, Rosemary lived in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where she protested discrimination against African Americans. She continued her activism after moving to Chicago in 1943, working as a volunteer in the city's first interracial recreation center. She also held several other occupations, at one time owning and operating a bookstore in Chicago's Near North Side.

In the early 1950s, Rosemary moved to Hawaii, where she worked as a community organizer for plantation workers and dockworkers and helped start a Honolulu chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

Rosemary became an active Unitarian in Hawaii, embracing that denomination's commitment to social justice and interfaith dialogue. In 1952, she co-founded and served as first president of the First Unitarian Fellowship (now Church) of Honolulu. Early parishioners included Stanley and

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Madelyn Dunham, who took their grandson Barack Obama to the church's Sunday school in the 1970s.

In 1955, Rosemary returned to Berkeley to work for the Pacific Coast Unitarian Council. She soon met Rev. Howard Matson, a minister at the San Francisco First Unitarian Church. The couple married in 1957.

In 1962, Rosemary joined the staff of the Starr King School for the Ministry, a Unitarian seminary in Berkeley. She worked at Starr King until 1978, first as a fundraiser, then as an administrator.

While at Starr King, Rosemary became a passionate advocate for women in the ministry. She played a key role in winning approval of a Women and Religion Resolution at the 1977 Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in Ithaca, New York. The resolution called for Unitarian Universalists to examine the extent to which their religious beliefs influenced sex-role stereotypes and to "avoid sexist assumptions and language." She later helped rid the denomination of sexist practices and promoted related rethinking of theology. Her motto: "We do not want a piece of the pie. It is still a patriarchal pie. We want to change the recipe."

Active in United Nations organizations, Rosemary participated in international conferences on women conducted in Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985. A committed pacifist, she co-founded a US-Soviet peace group in 1980 and helped organize and lead more than two dozen citizen diplomacy trips to the Soviet Union.

Both Rosemary and her husband Howard, who died in 1993, were dedicated proponents of human rights. Howard participated in the 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, led by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Both Matsons worked closely with Cesar Chavez and other activists to promote farm worker rights. Chavez lived incognito at the couple's Carmel Valley home for several months in 1970.

Both Rosemary and Howard received the Monterey County ACLU's Ralph B. Atkinson award for championing civil liberties: he in 1980, she in 1984. Rosemary received many other honors for her work for social justice, humanism, feminism, and international peace. In 2011, the Starr King School for the Ministry awarded her an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.

The Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Harvard University, holds an extensive collection of Rosemary's writings and research materials, documenting her involvement with Unitarian Universalist groups and other organizations.

In addition to a host of devoted friends and admirers, Rosemary is survived by a brother, two nieces, seven nephews, and numerous grand nieces and nephews.