

Water Communion Ceremony and Service
Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver
September 13, 2026

In Memoriam - Paul McLain 1946 - 2026
By Dean Yamamoto

Good Morning,

I've been asked by our Interim Minister Doug Wadkins, to offer this memorial statement and light a candle for Paul McLain, on Doug's behalf. Both he and Paul's spouse Donna gave me license to tweak a bit, the text many of you have read in the electronic announcement, earlier this week.

Donna, in conversation last night, asked me to convey to you that she'll be watching from home, thinking it would be too emotional to receive all your love and well-wishes in person and then need to make the long drive back to Longview.

Donna, we want you to be safe, and to also know of our love and best intentions with which we hold you in this moment.

Congregation, would you all take just 5 seconds to turn and wave to Donna right now. Thank you.

Now, for those of you who know Donna, you'll have no trouble imagining the twinkle in her eye, ever smiling, as she might have read this announcement to you:

In Memoriam - Paul McLain 1946-2026

I know you share with me, the sadness we feel at the the news of the death of my beloved husband, Paul McClain. He died at home with me, with the support of our hospice team, this past Wednesday.

Paul has been such an important part of the UUCV community since he and I moved here in 2000 after we both retired from Boeing, he a systems analyst, I, in various roles in the supply chain. He was such a good sport, not to hold it against me that I had the bigger pension! ...a testament to his character, I'd say. [Honestly she had the cutest giggle on relating this!]

Among his many connections with our church, Paul was an active, enthusiastic, and loyal member of the choir, served as the church treasurer until he became too ill from cancer, and generally offered his considerable skills and talents wherever he could.

Paul and I were long-term UUs before we joined the Vancouver congregation. Paul even explored the possibility of becoming a Unitarian Universalist minister, having taken

some seminary course work.

This congregation has been amazing in supporting us: many thanks to the Pastoral Care Team. So many of you have reached out in various ways, especially Dennis Megriditchian and Trish Pace.

To speak very personally for a moment, at the end, Paul was not eating, drinking, nor speaking, and it seemed curious how or why he was hanging on. Then, when he finally did draw his last breath on September 9th, it hit me: he was taking care of me one last time. This was the date his final social security check would be deposited into my account. (Whispered, “This is your cue for riotous applause, LOL!”) [pause]. Oh Paul!

I’ll be fine, but that was so Paul. On this note, Dean said I might be allowed a small commercial break: We do have 3, that is THREE, time shares I need to give away or exit from. I welcome all advice or takers.

Finally, Paul’s ashes will travel up to Seattle where his two sons and a sister reside, but I’ll try and organize a memorial here in Vancouver, details to come.

I’m so thankful to have you all and my 16 month old Golden Retriever puppy, “Buddy,” to get me through these days. Thank you, one and all.

Then this final line from Rev. Doug, “Our thoughts are with Donna and all of Paul’s friends and family who will miss his warm, generous presence.”

Thank you.

“Love you, Donna! I light this candle, on your behalf.”

Gathering of the Waters
By Dr. Rev. Doug Wadkins

It is such a joy to be with you (albeit in spirit for this week) as we embark on our journey together through these two years of interim ministry, stepping across the threshold of a homecoming into a new program year. As I prepare to begin this time with you, I am reminded of the many congregations that use a water ceremony to imbue greater meaning at the start of the new church year—a tradition I have cherished throughout my service. These rituals have been part of our movement for many years, and I recall the inspiring work of Carolyn McDade and Lucille Schuck Longview in 1980. They created a worship service for the Women and Religion Continental Convocation of Unitarian Universalists, which included a ritual celebrating our interconnectedness with one another and the totality of life on this planet. Today, we gather across generations to partake in a version of water communion, welcoming each other back into community. I want to invoke the spirit of this communion, representing both beginning and belonging.

Each moment brings the blessing of a beginner's mind, and certain seasons lend themselves to especially authentic feelings of renewal. We come together not only with intention to embark on this new year, filled with possibility and purpose, but also with the understanding that we carry the truths of our summer experiences within us—gifts we offer to our shared, co-mingled wholeness. Often, congregations invite members to bring a small amount of water from their summer to combine in a common bowl. I love the intention behind this ritual, as water is an evocative and primal symbol. However, I have seen it sometimes devolve into a travel log of exotic places visited over the summer. Conversely, some have poured in water straight from their taps, highlighting glossed-over differences within the congregation rather than fulfilling its intended purpose. Here, I appreciate that we have begun to shift our understanding. In one congregation where I served as an interim, we invited individuals to bring water that symbolized the essence of their summer experiences. This subtle change returned the ritual to its true purpose: honoring how our summers—whether joyous, challenging, or even quite ordinary—have shaped and transformed us. As we come back together, we recognize that each season leaves its mark on us, and we can bring forth those deeper truths as gifts to share in love.

One of the most profound spiritual truths we hold is that, through all seasons of life, we can best contribute our authentic selves and the experiences we've encountered. It is this blending of our individual truths into the richness and complexity of community that empowers us to change lives in meaningful ways, bit by bit, and to ultimately change the world.

With that truth in mind, some of you may have brought water with you this morning. I understand that some may be unaware or have simply forgotten. Regardless, all are invited to participate, whether or not you have water with you. In a moment, those present in the sanctuary will be invited to pour either real or imaginary water into our common bowl. If you haven't yet, please take a moment to fill out the cards you received upon entry, noting the meaning that your water represents for you this summer. We will share these reflections after gathering the waters.

As has been shared in past water ceremonies here:

This bowl represents our kinship with all of life. It is the cradle of existence. We honor our solidarity with those who work every day to draw and carry water in places that lack the most basic and precious resources. We honor our solidarity with those so fortunate as to expect clean water to come out of a tap in their homes every time they turn it, and we honor everyone in between.

We pour this water in recognition that 1 in 3 people worldwide don't have access to clean water that many of us here in this room and online take for granted.

We honor our connections with all
who share and promote a shared vision of justice
and a commitment to the environment.