



David Dwight Burr

October 13, 1934 - December 6, 2025

David Dwight Burr, age 91, of Blacksburg, Virginia, died Saturday, December 6, 2025 at the Kroontje Health Care Center at Warm Hearth Village. He was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts on October 13, 1934 to Henry Irving Burr and Ethelyn Eloise Suriner Burr. His beloved wife, Annette Parker Burr, predeceased him on January 2, 2025. He is survived by his daughter Catherine Ann Burr Drake (Fred Drake), son Jeffrey David Burr (Katherine Allen), grandchildren William, Christopher, and Erin Drake, brother-in-law Raymond Parker, and Elizabeth Allen. His grandson, Matthew Allen Special, died in 2011.

David grew up in the paper mill town of Dalton, Massachusetts. An only child, David lost his father when he was 8 years old. Yet, he and his mother, who was one of 13 children, were surrounded by her large family. David cherished his experiences with his aunts, uncles, and cousins from the Suriner family and loved telling stories about their influence on his life. He attended the University of Massachusetts for two years and then joined the Army and served throughout the northeast from 1954 to 1956. After the Army, David went to Oberlin College, where he received a BA in English Literature in 1958.

David met Annette, his cherished life partner of 67 years, at Oberlin College. They married on June 6, 1957, and moved around the country while David initially pursued a career as a minister in the United Church of Christ (UCC).

While earning a BD (1963) from Union Theological Seminary, David worked at the Japanese-American UCC in New York City. As a UCC minister, David and his young family served in campus ministries at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York as well as on the Oglala Lakota Indian Reservation in the Badlands, South Dakota. A lifelong advocate for social justice, David spent much of the 1960s taking groups to freedom marches and advocating for civil rights. The family moved to North Carolina, where David received his PhD in Church History in 1966 from Duke University. His doctoral dissertation was entitled *Ockham's Relation to Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus in His Formation of the Doctrine of Real Presence*.

In 1966, David joined the Department of History at Virginia Tech, and the family moved to Blacksburg. David enjoyed an illustrious career as a Professor of History at Virginia Tech. He also served on the Humanities and Interdisciplinary Studies faculties. David greatly enjoyed teaching students in every major about medieval history. David, Annette, Cathy, and Jeff travelled throughout Europe, living for a year at a time, in Florence Italy, Oxford England, and Cambridge England, often staying in monasteries. David was very active in the International Medieval Congress at the University of Western Michigan, The Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University, and taught in Italy and France. In 2001, he retired from Virginia Tech as Professor Emeritus of History.

Fluent in six languages, David published more than 100 scholarly papers and 10 book-length works in leading academic presses throughout his life, with several of his most celebrated works published in the 20 years after he retired. He loved the life of a scholar and practiced his craft daily—writing, translating, editing, and contemplating the mysteries of life—past, present, and future. His most influential books include *The Persecution of Peter Olivi* (1976, American Philosophical Society); *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty* (1989) and *Olivi's Peaceable Kingdom* (1993), both from the University of Pennsylvania Press;

The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis (2001, Pennsylvania State University Press); and the Book of Revelation (2019, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company). The Spiritual Franciscans, which was considered to be a brilliant analysis of the ideals of poverty and minority status in contrast to powerful church institutions, received numerous accolades, including the Marraro Prize for Italian History, the Shea Prize for Church History, and the Gründler Prize for Medieval Studies. Hailed as one of the world's experts on medieval Franciscan history and a champion of the works of Peter of John Olivi (1248-1298), David was honored with the Franciscan Institute Medal in 2005. In 2023, Poverty, Eschatology and the Medieval Church: Studies in Honor of David Burr (Edited by Michael F. Cusato and Dabney G. Park) was published (Brill), featuring 18 essays by leading scholars analyzing David's illuminating contributions to understanding human and spiritual life.

David was also a generous member of his community. For many years, he was engaged with the Catholic Mission in Haiti. He taught English as a second language to students from Korea and Vietnam. A lifelong animal lover, he walked dogs at the Humane Society and adopted many of them along the way. He was an avid musician, and he loved to sing and play the guitar and the trombone. He was physically active well into his ninth decade, and enjoyed gardening, swimming, hiking, and kayaking. David and Annette had lifelong friends—artists, scholars, and social activists of all kinds—who populated their home on major holidays and with whom they had lunch every Friday. In his later years, he especially enjoyed participating with his fellow Unitarians in the Wednesday discussion group, Conversations on Our Faith.

A memorial service to honor David's life will be held at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the New River Valley on Saturday, January 24, 2026 at 11:00 am, officiated by the Reverend Pam Philips. In lieu of flowers,

please consider honoring David's memory with a donation to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1301 Gladewood Drive, Blacksburg, VA 24060 or to the Montgomery County Humane Society of Montgomery County, 1183 Flanagan Drive, Christiansburg, VA 24073.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JAN **24**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Unitarian Universalist Congregation
1301 Gladewood Drive
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Tribute Wall

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“ *I cherish the memory of David, whom I knew well and with whom I was in constant personal contact while I taught at the University of Virginia from 1999 to 2010. My biography of St. Francis of Assisi owes much to David's work. --- Fr. Augustine Thompson, O.P., Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, Canada.*

Augustine Thompson O.P. - January 17 at 07:51 AM