

Rev. Beth Ellen Cooper **12-8-1975 to 9-2-2017**

The Rev. Beth Ellen Cooper died on September 2, 2017 at the age of 41.

Ellen was born on December 8, 1975 to parents Margaret and Gerald Cooper.

In Connecticut, Illinois, and New Jersey she grew up active in the Methodist faith, but later found her spiritual home in Unitarian Universalism—first at the UU Church in Cherry Hill, NJ. Ellen was an accomplished performer in community and high school theatre, and in 1994 she successfully auditioned for and completed the clowning program at Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Clown College in Baraboo, WI. Ellen then attended Rowan University, graduating in 1997 with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications. Over the next several years, during which she became a member of the First Unitarian Church of Portland, OR, Beth pursued work in several different fields. But after heeding her call toward ministry, Ellen earned her Master of Divinity from Meadville Lombard Theological School in 2008.

Rev. Cooper was ordained on June 1, 2007 by the UU Church of Bloomington-Normal, Bloomington IL. In August of 2008, she was called to serve Northwoods UU Church in The Woodlands, TX, outside Houston. Ellen's two beloved daughters were both born near the beginning of her ministry—Lilith just before, and Ingrid shortly after. Rev. Cooper ministered to Northwoods for seven years, during which she led the congregation through a deeper discernment of their mission, a restructuring of church staff, and an embrace of shared ministry. Under her leadership the church also increased its social justice work and strengthened its connection to the larger community, becoming home to more families and children. And Ellen regularly employed her theater background in her ministry, even donning her clowning costume or bringing in a puppet for special events. Rev. Cooper ministered to the Northwoods church until 2015.

Rev. Cooper was known as a spiritual leader across Texas and the country; her “online” congregation, through Twitter and Facebook, was far greater than what could fit in a church. She was a religion columnist for the *Houston Chronicle*, a reproductive justice liaison, and a member and spokesperson for the Texas Freedom Network's Clergy Advisory Board. Ellen was also a founding member of “Faith Voices for Choice,” a standing group of people of faith working for access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare for all people. In 2010, she was asked to lead the convocation of the Planned Parenthood Annual Luncheon, along with Houston Mayor Annise Parker. Rev. Cooper was also frequently invited to speak on topics related to social justice and faith.

Ellen's greatest personal interests were in performance—especially theatre, clowning, and puppetry—as well as applied arts, music, and teaching.

In the family's own tribute to Rev. Cooper's life and ministry, they offered these moving final words:

For those who loved her, and those who never had the chance, she would have wished the following: Find beauty in the everyday. Look skyward in the rain, and jump in a puddle. Breathe the mountain air, and wonder at the expanse of the ocean. Leave a treasure to be discovered by a stranger. Collect people and their experiences. Listen for the voices that are not heard. Write the poetry of the ordinary moment. Laugh, sing, create, play, and above all else, love.

She is survived by her husband Rev. Dr. Kirk Jeffery; daughters Ingrid and Lilith Cooper-Davis; parents Margaret and Gerald Cooper; and siblings Chris Smith, Kathy Perry, Phil Cooper, and Rebecca Coleman.