

Eleanor Shelton Morrison was born May 21, 1921, in Stonega, Virginia, to Floyd and Nelle (Morgan) Shelton. She died February 12, 2014, in East Lansing, Michigan. Eleanor was a passionate advocate for justice, lover of beauty, and skillful group leader.

She attended Wesleyan College for Women in Macon, Georgia. At a student YMCA-YWCA conference in the Blue Ridge Mountains, she met and fell in love with Truman Aldrich Morrison, Jr. Upon graduation from college, both headed north to attend seminary. She enrolled at Garrett Evangelical Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, earning a Master's in Religious Education. Truman and Eleanor were married in August 1942.

In the late 1940s, while Truman pastored Plymouth Congregational Church in Maywood, Illinois, Eleanor was involved in numerous community and church activities, including going door to door to support the founding of the United Nations. Both Eleanor and Truman received awards from the City Council in Chicago, the NAACP, and the Conference of Christians and Jews recognizing their work to promote interfaith and interracial justice.

In 1954, Truman became the founding pastor of Edgewood Church, and Eleanor became deeply involved in both community and church activities in East Lansing. Soon she was advocating an Open Occupancy Ordinance in East Lansing to outlaw racial discrimination by real estate brokers and home owners.

For 16 years, Eleanor taught in the Michigan State University Department of Family and Child Sciences and the medical school; offering the first human sexuality courses at MSU. She published seven books, including one on how to teach sexuality to undergraduates. She became an advocate for lesbian and gay civil liberties, serving on a legislative task force looking at the definition of family.

In 1976, Eleanor was ordained to ministry in the United Church of Christ and served on the staff of Edgewood Church. In 1981, she and Truman became visiting professors at Chicago Theological Seminary, where she received an honorary doctor of letters.

Eleanor was then called to a congregation in Portland, Michigan. After leaving Portland in 1987, she and her daughter Melanie founded Leaven, a non-profit through which they offered workshops, trainings, and retreats around the country. Leaven's motto was "if we would be as leaven, there could be an uprising of hope." Through Leaven, Eleanor helped to launch The Leaven Center, a retreat and study center. While working with Leaven in the early years, she also served on the ministerial staff at Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Lansing.

Eleanor especially loved the Morrison cabin on Lake Michigan and her 95-acre farm in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Southwest Virginia. She took great delight in sharing these sacred places with family, friends, and the participants of many retreats she led in both locations.

Eleanor raised four children, maintained friendships near and far, and served as a mentor, role model, and confidante for countless women and men. Many have found the courage and inspiration to speak in their own voices, trust their gifts, or choose a career path because of Eleanor Morrison.

In 2009, Eleanor moved to Burcham Hills, where she became a beloved member of their residential community.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Truman, and her brother, Arthur. Eleanor is survived by her children: Truman A. Morrison, III, of Washington, DC; Melanie Morrison of Okemos, Michigan; Wendy Morrison of Kensington, California; Stephanie Morrison-Hrbek of Cleveland; eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

A memorial service celebrating Eleanor's life will be in the spring at Edgewood United Church. Memorial gifts can be made to Edgewood United Church, 469 N. Hagadorn Rd., East Lansing, MI 48823.