

# In Memoriam

## James Stewart Ehrhart

November 6, 1937–January 3, 2020

Writers:

Frank Kotowski, LM  
Summerland Church of Light, NSAC, NY  
Joe Owen,  
Golden Gate Spiritualist Church, CA

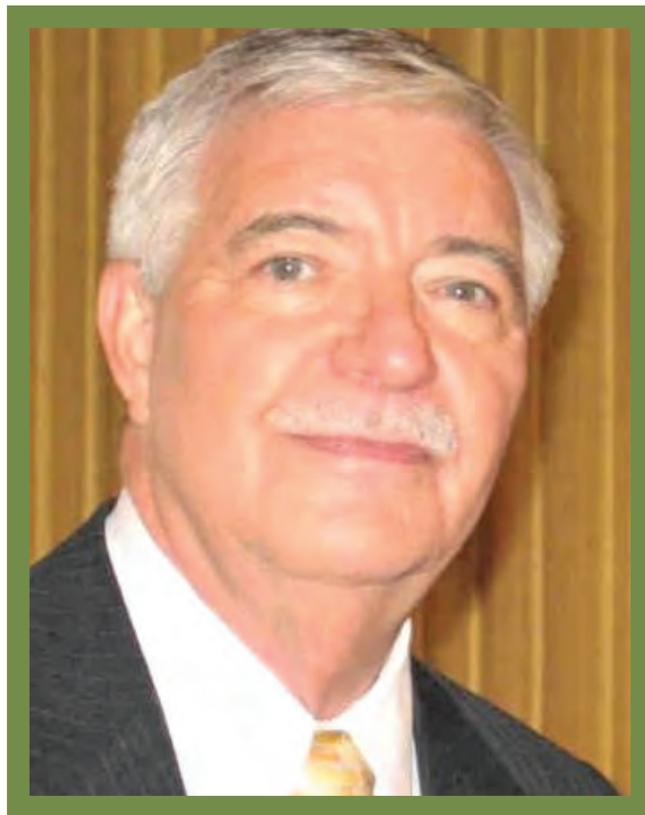
James Stewart Ehrhart, a native of Le Roy, New York, passed into spirit suddenly on January 3, 2020. He is survived by his partner of 46 years, Joe Owen. Jim was a partner with Joe in Professional Communications, a San Francisco company specializing in multiple-association management and print graphics services for over 38 years.

Jim was the oldest sibling of nine children. His parents were Stewart Clemens Ehrhart and Matilda Jean (Prendergast) Ehrhart, and he is survived by his brother David (Ann) Ehrhart of Le Roy; sisters Sharon Hyde of Coffeyville, Kansas; and Mary Connelly (Wayne Ford) and Margaret (Ron) Debellis of Batavia.

In 1955, Jim was a member of the first graduating class of Notre Dame High School in Batavia, a city west of Le Roy. He became a student of all religions, but found his spiritual home later in life in Spiritualism. Along his spiritual path, he studied the Shaker movement, for which he took pilgrimages. Jim was a contemplative man who found peace in meditation.

After graduating from Notre Dame High School, Jim enlisted in the U.S. Navy. After completing a tour with the U.S. Navy in Maryland and then Cuba, Jim took up residence in New York City, later moving to San Francisco, where he met Joe Owen, who was to become his lifelong partner.

Jim's deep compassion was an active one. He was a champion of the downtrodden and disenfranchised and worked actively to make lasting change. No chore or effort for a good and moral cause was beneath him. He spent many hours cooking breakfast at the Martin de Porras House of Hospitality, a facility inspired by the Catholic Worker Movement. This still remains a free restaurant served by volunteers and a community of people with a variety of spiritual faiths.



Another social cause that Jim was fully engaged in was the rights of gays, especially Catholic gays and their treatment by the Catholic Church. In 1981, he was one of 14 members of the San Francisco Archdiocesan Task Force on Homosexuality and Social Justice. This Task Force made 54 recommendations for reform on such issues as violence, homosexuality in the Latino community, gay life, education, and others.

The Reverend Ehrhart attained all credentials with the NSAC, which included Ordained Minister, National Spiritualist Teacher, Certified Medium, and Commissioned Spiritualist Healer. Jim served for 4 years on the Board of Trustees of the NSAC and was the Vice President of the Morris Pratt Institute.

Jim was the author and editor of the 20th edition of the *NSAC Spiritualist Manual* and the *NSAC Religious Services* book. At the 2016 NSAC Convention, Jim received the NSAC Teacher Award. Recently, Jim developed and wrote a new 27-lesson MPI course titled *Spiritualism: A Religion of Happiness*. At the 2019 NSAC Convention, Jim received the NSAC Literary Award.

At an earlier NSAC Convention, Jim delivered a sermon at one of the evening services where he asked those present to become like the “bluebird of

happiness.” Jim’s sermons seemed simple but conveyed universal and powerful truths. He often added poems and song lyrics to his sermons, which gave them color and warmth. For another sermon, Jim included the lyrics for the song "I Want to Be Happy" (music by Vincent Youman and lyrics by Irving Caesar, written for the 1925 musical *No, No, Nanette*). The lyrics start out with these words:

I'm a very ordinary man  
 Trying to work out life's happy plan  
 Doing unto others as I'd like to have them  
 doing unto me

When I find a very lonely soul  
 Soon be-kinda-comes my only goal  
 I feel so much better when I tell them my  
 philosophy

I want to be happy  
 But I won't be happy  
 Till I make you happy too.

One of Jim’s interests throughout his life was traveling. This began when he was a child, when he enjoyed summers with his maternal grandparents, James and Matilda Prendergast. Jim would accompany his grandfather James as he traveled the roads of Livingston County. Jim continued to travel and explore, climbing 4,800 feet up Half Dome in Yosemite National Park and having adventures in Europe and New Zealand. In 1979, he ventured across the ocean to visit Israel, primarily as a pilgrim. He made all his own arrangements, and always considered his two-day stay in Galilee along the shore of the lake there to be the highlight of that visit.



Golden Gate Spiritualist Church, San Francisco.  
 Photo by Valerie Miller.



Jim Ehrhart sitting in Harry Edward's chair during a trip to England in 2008. Photo courtesy of Joe Owen.



Jim Ehrhart having a chat with Eileen Roberts, one of England's most loved and influential mediums. Photo courtesy of Joe Owen.

Apart from traveling to see and immerse himself in the beautiful landscapes of America, Jim enjoyed the excitement of New York. His many trips there nearly always included visits to museums, and attending opera and Broadway shows.

Jim’s greatest passion was education. He taught a monthly class at his church, Golden Gate Spiritualist Church, San Francisco, for over 12 years, and compiled a new Lessons from Spirit handout for each class. Church President Michael Franklin said of him upon his passing, “His wisdom, insight, and clarity made Spiritualism understandable, approachable, and complete. We were privileged to be his students, and I do not believe that we will see his like again.”