



First
Unitarian Universalist
Church of San Diego

FirstWords

Our Monthly Magazine

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Journey Towards Wholeness - Who We Are and Why We Do the Work

by JTW Team Members

The Journey Towards Wholeness Committee was created in 1997, as a committee of the Board. Their mission is to help the Board and ministers promote, monitor, and assess the work of dismantling systems of oppression to help First UU become a genuinely anti-racist, anti-oppression, multicultural institution.

Their goals are to:

- Create and maintain connections with the anti-oppression and racial justice initiatives of the UUA and UUSC, and to create channels of communication and invitation for wide participation from our congregation in these initiatives.
- Work closely with the Social Justice Executive Team (SJET) and our other social justice teams to encourage multiple ways to bring the lens of racial justice to bear on the full range of justice issues in which we engage.
- Create and support ongoing education of our congregation on white privilege and white supremacy culture, the harms that arise from internalized racism, and how to become more effective in anti-racism activism.
- Seek opportunities to support anti-racism events, actions, protests, and advocacy in the greater San Diego region, especially those initiated by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) organizations and leaders.

The current members of the core JTW team are Rosalba Ciampi, the liaison from the Board; Valerie Jaques (who is rotating off the team to become Board Vice President), Bill James; Ruth Turner, and Tonia Vyenielo.

When asked what compels them to do this work, they said:

Rosalba: "Since I've adopted two children of color from two different countries (Nepal and the Congo) I've discovered what it means to live with diversity and marginalization.

Valerie: "I've discovered that it is unusual to come from a privileged family that recognizes its racism. My mother said, "I know I'm racist, I have to work on that."

Bill: "I'm very aware that I'm living a segregated life. I want to be in community with diverse people who would enjoy First UU but don't feel comfortable here yet."

Ruth: I thought First UU was doing very good work on diversity and inclusion until we had the BIPOC defection a few years ago. I want to understand what caused that rift and I want to make sure

we don't continue those misunderstandings between people of different racialized identities.

Tonia: Percy Shelley, "An identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own."

To help with this understanding, Ruth and Louise Titlow will be starting a 'Racialized Identities' book group to read and discuss our different experiences and how they can work together to create a better community. If you'd like to join this book group, contact ltitlow@gmail.com or r2rner@yahoo.com.

In the last year, on a 5th Tuesday with the Board, the team led a discussion of the "Rethinking Thanksgiving" toolkit produced by the Indigenous Solidarity Network. JTW sponsored an anti-racism workshop last October, presented by the San Diego Chapter of SURJ (Showing up for Racial Justice). For the last two years, JTW and other members of the congregation have reviewed the *Widening the Circle of Concern* report of the UUA's (Unitarian Universalist Association's) Commission on Institutional Change which outlines the improvements needed for the anti-oppressive and anti-racism practices of the UUA and its congregations.

This year, JTW will be working on a covenant with the Board on what is meant by wholeness in Journey Towards Wholeness. The team points out that the most diverse community at First UU is currently our youngest members, the children. JTW members also want to talk more often from the pulpit about their efforts to reach their goals.

Finally, JTW hopes to recruit people who want to be part of their anti-oppressive/anti-racism work. If you have ideas, or suggestions, or questions about JTW work, contact any member of the team, or use their email, jtw@firstuusandiego.org.

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Our First Year Together

by Rev. Justine Sullivan, *Lead Minister*



What a year this has been. When I arrived in August 2022, you had just returned to worshipping in the Meeting House. Each week sees joyful reunion hugs on the Hillcrest patio between beloveds who've not seen one another in person since the pandemic began.

One of the challenges I face in transitional ministry is to avoid joining in the anxious energy that builds up in times of transition. I must remember to breathe and help those

around me remember to breathe, to slow things down. I'm convinced that getting to know one another and finding our way together is valuable and useful for the work ahead. We're just where we need to be at the end of this first year.

Worship is vibrant and meaningful, spirit filled, and playful. Thank you Andrea, Kate, Lorelei, Marshall, Tomás, and Tony and all our ensembles for the beautiful music. Thanks to Kate, Lara, and Tony, our children spend time in worship with the adults and learn together in their classes. The youth and young adult groups have returned. Folks of all ages will attend Family Camp at de Benneville Pines this month.

Our governance is faithful and strong with excellent leadership from Board President Cora Pendergast and financial oversight from Treasurer Sue Marberry. Our staff is deeply committed to helping First UU fulfill its mission, to be a beacon of liberal religion and progressive values to help heal our beautiful, aching world.

In June, we say goodbye to our beloved Reverend Omega, who's served so beautifully these past two years. I've loved serving alongside her, and Pasadena is blessed to have called her as their next senior minister. In August, we welcome the Reverend Kristen Kuriga as our new Assistant Minister. You might remember Kristen from her time here as our Social Justice and South Bay Ministry Coordinator. I look forward to serving with her and welcoming her husband Joshua and their son Lucas into our community. Returning to being a teaching congregation, we welcome a ministerial intern, Swamini Adityananda Saraswati, who will serve part time for two years.

This summer our Director of Operations, Robie Evans, takes a well-earned sabbatical for much of the summer. Tony Bianca and I, with help from staff and volunteers, will fill in for Robie. I thank you in advance if it takes a longer than usual to get a problem solved or a question answered. Our gift to Robie is to keep things running as smoothly as we can in her absence!

I'm also taking time off this summer. Dale and I (and our dog Callie) are going on a road trip up the coast the last two weeks of July, returning refreshed and ready to begin again in August.

May your summers be full of time with loved ones and activities that refresh and nourish you. I cannot wait to start our second year together.

Justine

June Sermon Schedule

June's Transformational Theme:
"Delight"

Hillcrest Worship Time:

Sundays, 10 am, Meeting House,
Hillcrest Patio & *Livestream* Worship

June 4, 2023

"Our Time Together"

Rev. Justine Sullivan, *Lead Minister*

June 11, 2023

"Saying Hello and Goodbye"

Rev. Justine Sullivan & Rev. Omega Burckhardt

June 18, 2023

"Father's Day"

UU Men's Fellowship

June 26, 2023

GA Worship

South Bay Worship Time:

1st & 3rd Sundays, 10 am, Suite 104

June 4, 2023

"Delight in Imagining the Future"

Rev. Dr. Omega Burckhardt, *Assistant Minister*

June 18, 2023

GA Worship

What a Year!

by Tony Bianca, *Director of Lifespan Faith Formation*



What a year! Lifespan Programs at First UU have blossomed in the 2022-23 church year as we regained the ability to gather in-person and rebooted some of the programs that were put on hold over the past few years.

With the addition to our staff of Youth and Young Adult Coordinator, Lara Anderson, we now have three groups meeting regularly during the 10 am Service. Most notably, we have a youth group that, in addition to meeting on Sundays, plans monthly youth outings that included a trip to Jump Zone, a pumpkin carving party, a trip to the Science Center, and a visit to Mission Trails. Our Young Adult Group has also been established and meets weekly on Thursday nights for conversation, community, and fun.

We hosted several multigenerational events that included a beach bonfire, a trip to the Kumeyaay Cultural Center in Barona, our 150th Anniversary Festival, and, most recently, our annual All Church Camp at Camp de Benneville Pines. As of right now, we have 86 campers registered for camp with 1/3 of those registered under the age of 17. There are two more multi-generational gatherings planned for this summer on Saturday evenings, July 22 and August 19. Mark your calendars and look for more information about these events in The Window.

In May, we wrapped up the first session of Our Whole Lives (Grades 7-9) we've offered in three years. Eight participants joined us from across the region. This summer, we'll have some time to plan the reboot of our Bridging and Coming of Age programs in the fall.

We've begun offering our monthly Parents Night Out program, where we provide dinner and childcare for an evening so parents can get some much-needed time for themselves. Over the summer, we'll be offering three more of those evenings on June 29, July 27, and August 24.

We've released five episodes of a new podcast, *The First Source*, in which I interview First UU congregants about issues of faith, spirituality, congregational life, and life in general. Episode 6 will be a special Camp edition in which I'll interview campers who attend our All Church Camp. [Link to First Source podcast](#)

Finally, we've hosted a very successful monthly Adult RE Speaker Series with over 180 individuals participating to hear speakers from across the nation. This series also helped some of the smaller UU congregations in our region by providing Adult RE program offerings to communities who don't have the numbers and resources that we are fortunate enough to have. We'll pause our Speaker Series over the summer months and, in their place, schedule several in-person, Adult RE dinner conversations at our South Bay Campus.

I look forward to seeing you at these summer events.

Rev. Omega's Farewell to First UU

by Rev. Dr. Omega Burckhardt, *Assistant Minister*



As I write this, I sit in the South Bay social hall with the mural of the joyful community on the wall above the table where I'm working. The reproduction of this mural also hangs on the exterior wall of the RE wing at Hillcrest, a reminder of the interconnection of these two campuses and the mission that both hold of creating a more just and loving Beloved Community.

During my two years at First UU, I've split my time between both campuses, a sometimes clumsy but always well-intentioned desire to be present for the larger congregation and all the smaller communities of which it's comprised. As I look at the mural on the wall, I can see how easy it's been to get caught up in the granular—the individual brushstrokes, textures, angles, and edges. In some ways, this is similar to my time here: having to focus on the day-to-day small tasks and

complications to work in community to keep this church strong during such an important transitional time.

But when I move back from the painting, just as I'm shifting my focus wider now that my time with you draws short, I see other beautiful patterns emerging. Over my time here, the Food and Diaper Pantry has proven that the mission of this church has been successful in the South Bay and is worthy of celebration. Deep community relationships have been formed, a fitting marker of the *quinceañera* of the South Bay campus this year.

Groups of all kinds continue to grow again at both campuses and online, demonstrating how the isolation of the pandemic reminded us of our interconnection and need for communal support. The worship experiences at both of our campuses have been broadened in scope and in depth, a trend not necessarily evident in other parts of the UU world (or other communities of faith).

None of these were a given in the late summer of 2021. You all have made this beauty happen. You've turned the individual brushstrokes into a loving community again. This community worked through grief and uncertainty, getting to a place of readiness to embrace the challenges of today and tomorrow. It's been an honor to accompany you in this process of learning and growth (for this congregation and for me, personally and professionally).

As I move into another phase of my ministry, this congregation, with the leadership of Rev. Justine and other ministers to come, will continue to grow in understanding of yourselves in relationship to this rapidly changing world. I look forward to your future, First UU, and I'll always hold my time here with gratitude and tenderness.

Rev. Dr. Omega Burckhardt was recently called as the new settled Senior Minister at Neighborhood UU Church in Pasadena. We'll be saying goodbye to her in June.

Meet our new Administrative Assistant, Jazmine Ramanathan

by Nancy Fisk, *First Words Editor*



Jazmine Ramanathan began working as the First UU Administrative Assistant in May 2023. Working for us part-time, she is also currently pursuing a degree at UCSD in business psychology and economics and will graduate in May 2024.

Previously, she's worked in marketing, finance, health, and tech startups. She likes the job here because it's multi-faceted, with elements of finance and graphic design. She does well with organization and has earned the nickname Martha Stewart for her skills in this area.

In addition to this job and school, she's serving in the Army

National Guard, which she has done for the past four years. After basic training and then job training as military police, she now works at headquarters in Kearny Mesa in the personnel division.

Jazmine is learning about Unitarian Universalism and so far appreciates that there are no specific tenets to be adhered to, nor is there a belief in a deity. She admires Unitarian Universalism for being all inclusive, and positive towards all genders and all sexualities. She has experience as a journalist and feels we need to get the word out about Unitarian Universalism—that more people would be drawn to it if they knew more about it.

Originally from the Bay area, she has family there. Here in San Diego, she lives with a mini bernedoodle, a Bernese mountain dog/poodle mix she adores.

Jazmine likes working for the First UU office because she likes being surrounded by kind people, who are so accepting of others. Welcome to First UU, Jazmine!

Incoming Assistant Minister, Kristen Kuriga

by Kristen Kuriga, *Incoming Assistant Minister*



Dear First UU Church of San Diego,

I'm delighted to be joining you as your Assistant Minister in August! I look forward to getting to know you, worshipping together, and building beloved community. I previously served at First UU as the Social Justice & South Bay Ministry Team Coordinator. I was on staff from September 2009 to August 2016.

My call as a minister is at the intersection of spirituality, social justice, and art. I am passionate about spiritual growth, transformative worship, working for justice and equity, and building healthy congregations with strong lay leadership.

For the past five years I've been serving as the settled Minister of Saltwater UU Church in Des Moines, WA. You can learn more about me and my ministry at my website: <http://www.revkristenkuriga.com/>

My family and I will be moving to San Diego in July, including my husband Joshua and my son, Lucas (who will be turning five this summer). I can't wait to start our work together in August!

Blessings,
Rev. Kristen Kuriga

Our Next Intern Minister: Swamini Adityananda Saraswati

by Nancy Fisk, *First Words Editor*



Our next intern minister will be Swamini Adityananda Saraswati. She's a Hindu Unitarian Universalist, who will be working with us part-time for the next two years. Swamini is a monastic who took vows on the banks of the Ganges River over 10 years ago. Swamini is the feminine for Swami, which means a renunciant and spiritual teacher. Adityananda is the name given to her when she became a monastic. And Saraswati is the monastic order she belongs to, much as Catholic priests might belong to the Franciscans or the Jesuits.

Originally from the Chicago region, Swamini lived in India for twelve years, returning to the USA during the pandemic. While residing in India, Swamini spearheaded the development and growth of the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA). She was responsible for its original concept, overall design, strategic plans, programs, partnership development, general operations, policy publications and fundraising for nearly a decade. She strove to address poverty, climate change, child marriage, water scarcity and public

health concerns. Largely as a result, GIWA was globally launched at UNICEF World Headquarters, in partnership with UNICEF, the Government of the Netherlands, and USAID. She subsequently conceptualized and led campaigns that impacted millions, resulting in accolades including a Guinness World Record.

Swamini also served as the Interim Executive Director of the world's largest interfaith organization, United Religions Initiative, as well as the Associate Executive Director of the Elijah Interfaith Institute, which works closely with faith leaders including the Pope and Dalai Lama.

Prior to that, she co-founded the Pan-African Association, a refugee mutual-assistance agency which enabled thousands of survivors of war, hunger, genocide, persecution, and torture from across the world to survive and thrive. She later spearheaded rights-based campaigns with a large international charity, including in five African nations, a war zone, and other global locations.

Now, as she takes her next steps in her vocation of service to humanity, she is working towards a Master of Divinity at Meadville Lombard Theological School and sits on the Board of UU Ministry for Earth. She chose to become a UU minister as a continuation of UU's long association with Hinduism, including as part of the Brahma Samaj (a monotheistic sect), of which her hero, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), was once a member. Unitarian Universalism also resonates deeply with her interfaith spirit and prophetic style of ministry. She greatly appreciates how Unitarian Universalism is there for everyone, without restrictions, and looks forward to joining and serving the First UU family in September. To learn more about Hindu Unitarian Universalists, visit www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/beliefs/hinduism

Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Choir of San Diego

The Gospel Choir will be joined by First UU San Diego music director Marshall Voit, who has spent 20 years studying and performing music for social justice and social change. Marshall will open the concert with a program of freedom and justice songs that he's collected during that time, including protest music classics, original compositions, and lesser known but equally moving songs for social change.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Choir of San Diego



Songs of Liberation
7:30 pm Saturday June 10th, 2023

[Get Tickets](#)

Featuring First UU San
Diego Music Director
Marshall Voit

Summer Choirs

by Marshall Voit, *Music Director*

This summer, our music staff will be participating in some professional development opportunities and enjoying some well-earned time off. But the thought of not singing together with you for 10 weeks made us all blue. So, we've come up with this plan for the First UU San Diego 2023 Summer Choir, which will include four sessions (detailed below) with Marshall, Tomas, Lorelei, and Andrea conducting. You're welcome to join us for some or all of the sessions; we ask only that if you plan to sing in any of our Sunday service performances, you please commit to attending both of the preceding rehearsals.

Looking forward to seeing you on Wednesdays, Mondays, and/or Sundays this summer.

Session 1: Jewish Music, Marshall Voit, director
Rehearsals on Wednesdays, June 14 and June 28, 7-8:30pm
Performance on Sunday, July 2, 10am

Session 2: Musica Latinoamericana, Tomas Acosta, director
Rehearsals on Wednesdays, July 5 and 12, 7-8:30pm
Performance on Sunday, July 16, 10am

Session 3: Classical Music, Lorelei Isidro-Garner, director
Rehearsals on Mondays, July 17 and 24, 6:30-8pm
Performance on Sunday, July 30, 10am

Session 4: Chants and Meditations, Andrea Spiero, director
Rehearsals on Sundays, August 6 and 13, 11:30am-1pm
Performance on Sunday, August 20, 10am

Staff

Rev. Justine Sullivan, Lead Minister
Rev. Dr. Omega Burckhardt, Assistant Minister
Rev. Jim Grant and Rev. Lône Broussard, Affiliate Ministers
Rev. Bonnie Tarwater, Rev. Frank Piccone-Willey, Rev. Julie Forest
and Rev. Katy Swanson, Affiliate Community Ministers
Robie Evans, Director of Operations
Tony Bianca, Director of Lifespan Faith Formation
Rose Littler-Riedel, Membership Development and Communications
Chris Chambers, Social Justice Coordinator
Lara Anderson, Youth and Young Adult Coordinator
Kate Collier, Program Assistant
Jazmine Ramanathan, Administrative Assistant
Pam Bates, Scheduler
Marshall Voit, Music Director
Lorelei Isidro-Garner, Music Coordinator
Andrea Speiro, JUUL Tones Ensemble Director
Tomás Acosta, Collaborative Pianist
Connie Hayes, Controller / Bookkeeper
Ray Evans, Maintenance
Joshua Morrison, Janitor
Mark Epler, Event Coordinator
Revs. Dr. Carolyn and Dr. Tom Owen-Towle, Ministers Emeriti

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