



First
Unitarian Universalist
Church of San Diego

FirstWords

Our Monthly Magazine

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Introducing Marshall Voit, First UU Music Director

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

Marshall Voit began working in January for First UU as the new Music Director. So far, he's very impressed with the professionalism of the staff and the welcome he's received. When in-person singing is allowed, he'll be directing the Chalice Choir and the Women's Choir. Until then, he's collaborating with the other music staff members on our worship services.

A native of San Diego, Marshall went to high school in the Poway Unified School District. He credits them with a foundation in music education that has led to his career in choral direction, singing, and playing musical instruments. Raised in the Jewish tradition, his father is a Jewish music leader, and his mother is a rabbi.

He started playing the trumpet when he was 10, and later was convinced to take up the tuba. He participated in marching band and wind ensembles. Convinced to join a choir ensemble by friends, Marshall discovered that because he had studied instrumental music and music theory, he had a knack for reading choral music. His senior project in high school was directing the choir through a few numbers. His high school choir director is still one of his mentors.

He did his undergraduate work at UCLA, where he finished a degree in Geography. His musical outlet was playing for Hillel at UCLA. He ended up working for the Wilshire Blvd Synagogue.

Marshall was invited to Australia to work with a rabbi who wanted to create a music training program for reformed Jews. After two years as a musician-in-residence in Australia and creating conferences where he taught the skills of running a successful musical program, Marshall returned to the US to get a degree in Ethnomusicology at San Diego State.

Discovering Unitarian Universalism in 2014 while

preparing for a summer tour, Marshall sang with ten UU congregations that summer, and immediately felt that UUs were his kind of people. He likes that he can be who he is culturally, with no pressure to believe in a particular doctrine or creed. And, that he is not only accepted but valued. He was a musician at the UUA General Assembly in 2015. After working for Temple Emanuel as a musician and choir director, he went to work for the San Dieguito UU Fellowship in 2020, as their music director.



His hobbies include team sports, with friends he met in college. Right now, they play disc golf. He also sings in a barbershop quartet, a hobby he's pursued since he was 14. His group is called Los Bordershop. There are six members—three are Mexican citizens, two are US citizens, and one has dual citizenship. They're working on a repertoire of Spanish barbershop quartets, which usually means they have to do their own arrangements.

As a choir director, Marshall loves the chance to present something uplifting, to make music in a way that's spiritually nourishing and musically satisfying. He has a passion for making music and is grateful he can support himself with it, a privilege he knows not everyone has. He would love to get to know people here at First UU. Feel free to reach out to Marshall and introduce yourself. His email is marshall@firstuusandiego.org.

Also in this issue:

- To Invoke Love by Rev. Deanna Vandiver Pg 2
- Pardon My Mess by Tony Bianca Pg 3
- Unfolding Peace by Nancy Fisk Pg 4
- Where We're Going by Listening Circles Planning Team Pg 5
- Our Next Minister-in-Residence by Nancy Fisk Pg 6
- Spirit Level Foundation by Lisa Schaffer Pg 6
- Music Lecture Series at First UU by Nancy Fisk Pg 7

To Invoke Love

by Rev. Deanna Vandiver, *Minister in Residence*

To invoke Love

Is to take the risk of inviting chaos to visit the spaces

You spent so much time making tidy,

And watch as the breath of life scatters everything

You have only just folded and put away.

~ from *To Invoke Love* by Rev. Sean Parker Dennison,

Breaking and Blessing: Meditations



My partner taught me that “you have a plan before you can deviate.”

Friends, we've made so many plans lately, only to have to deviate, pivot, shift, adapt, adjust. Octavia Butler was truly on point when she

wrote “*The only lasting truth is Change.*”

Keeping our mission at the center of our attention and practice is essential for faithfully navigating our congregational life with hope through dynamic times. When we consistently remember our collective mission **to create community, to nurture spiritual growth, and to act on our values to help heal the world**, our choices about how to be together with hope through the changes become clearer. As Rev.

Theresa Ninán Soto writes in *Spilling the Light: Meditations on Hope and Resilience*: “*Just as mastering physical skills takes a lot of training and practice, mastering communal hope requires that we stay at it and do the actions that will bring about new states of being and new futures. “We are all in this together” means that we choose each other, over and over, as sources and communities of hope. Maybe we will repeat it often. Changing our reality often takes more than one try.*”

Centered by our mission, made hopeful by our practice, we can be grounded by our covenant with each other as a faith community, our promise to “*treat ourselves and one another with respect. We vow to live our values, to learn, and to serve in ways that are fulfilling and responsible.*”

We who invoke love with hopeful courage are not alone as *the breath of life scatters everything*. We choose each other. We choose to risk this journey towards collective liberation through all the changes, breathing in and breathing out.

Love,

Rev. Deanna Vandiver
Minister in Residence

February Sermon Messages

Worship Time:

Livestream Worship:

Sunday, 9:30 am

(ASL Interpretation)

<https://www.firstuusandiego.org/>

**February's
Transformational Theme is:
"Seeking/Curiosity"**

February 6, 2022

Pacific Regional Assembly Worship

February 13, 2022

"Unfolding Peace"

Rev. Deanna Vandiver, *Minister in Residence*

and Rev. Dr. Denise Graves

February 20, 2022

"Turning Vinegar to Honey"

Rev. Kathleen McTigue, *Minister in Residence*

February 27, 2022

"Dancing With the Mystery"

Rev. Kathleen McTigue, *Minister in Residence*

Pardon My Mess

by Tony Bianca, *Program Director*



I've been thinking a lot recently about clutter. We've just begun a major "spring cleaning" and reorganization of Rm. 115, Rm. 113, the RE supply closet, and the former Director of Religious Education's (DRE's) office. I was surprised at how much stuff had accumulated.

As I said in a recent *Time For All Ages*, I think life is, for the most part, a lot messier than we like to think it is. Especially in this era when everything is curated, decorated, and edited for the screen, it's easy to forget that life isn't as tidy and well-produced as it looks on camera. On one hand, Zoom has allowed us to (virtually) invite people right into our home for work, socialization, and even First UU activities and services. But it also allows us to limit what they see to the roughly 6 x 6 area directly behind us. And now, as the technology's advanced, we can even blur the background or use a virtual background to hide even that.

First UU is the same. It's been almost two years of seeing only what the camera focuses on. Maybe we've forgotten about that cultured little shelf that was often the first thing one sees upon entering the Meeting House. Or that cluster of mismatched chairs tucked in the corner in front of the fire hose. And that's just what you can see from the congregation's perspective. Have you ever seen the pulpit from the chancel? If you dug behind the candle nubs, rolls of tape and

pens that don't write anymore, I wouldn't be surprised to find sermon notes from the 1970s.

I hope, at this point, you're not horrified. I don't want to give you the impression that things aren't organized or clean. And these aren't things that have accumulated because someone isn't doing their job. I'm only talking about the normal level of clutter that anyone with a junk drawer in their house would be familiar with. It's the "I'll-get-that-later-and-then-forgot" kind of stuff, but why bring it up?

Well, as we eventually come back together again, I think it might be easy to have some unrealistic expectations. It's possible I'm remembering "the way things used to be" with rose-colored glasses. Maybe I've been so focused on what I've been

missing that I've forgotten all the little things that weren't so perfect . . . the things I don't miss.

As we come back together, I hope we'll be gentle with ourselves and each other. There are aspects of not only my space, but of myself as well, that haven't been seen by the public in a long time. There are things I'm out of practice at. Communal muscles, so to speak, that I haven't had to exercise in quite some time. So, as we

gather together again, please pardon both my literal and metaphorical mess. I know it's there. I'm working on it and I should have most of it under control by the time company arrives, but maybe not all of it. I'm eager to see you, but maybe you could ignore the coat that I've hung on the stationary bike and, for goodness sake, give me a few more weeks before you open the closet.



Unfolding Peace: An interview with Rev. Deanna Vandiver

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

NOTE: In the March issue, First Words will publish an interview with Rev. Denise Graves, the other member of the collaboration that is Unfolding Peace.

Rev. Deanna Vandiver, founder of Ever Unfolding (a ministry of spiritual accompaniment for people and organizations on the journey of collective liberation), is serving as our Minister in Residence from January to mid-February. The Rev. Dr. Denise Graves, founder of Peace Ministry (building relationships that enhance our world), has graciously agreed to partner with Rev. Deanna and First UU in a process of Unfolding Peace. They have been hired to accompany us in our work to resolve the many conflicts and to heal any harm we have experienced in the past few years.

Julie Forest says the Board was contacted by the Rev. Patrice Curtis from the Transitions Office at UUA, who helped bring Rev. Deanna here. Our regional contact, the Rev. Sarah Gibb Millsbaugh, let the Board know about Unfolding Peace's healing work. The interim executive team, responding to the expressed needs of the congregation, decided to hire the team. Julie Forest says, "I'd like the congregation to know there's no magic potion to healing and this is part of our trying to respond [to the congregation's needs]."

Rev. Denise and Rev. Deanna have begun practicing deep listening and witness with beloveds impacted by the congregational struggles, including staff and congregational leadership. They're attending the Listening Circle Planning Team meetings and spending time with the responses many of us shared to the Listening Circle questions:

- For you, what has formed the foundation of your relationship with our congregation? Has that changed in the past 18 months or longer?
- If you're struggling with anything in your relationship to our congregation right now, what does that struggle look like?
- What might motivate you to participate in & support our congregation even more wholeheartedly?

As they bear witness to our stories, they're gathering our many narratives and digging into our recent conflict healing processes—including the timeline created when the Rev. Marta Valentin held a workshop with First UU in 2018. The timeline, once posted in

the back of the Meeting House, is a collective history of First UU, including members of the congregation sharing a history of microaggressions against BIPOC communities within our congregation.

Rev. Deanna came to this work through her involvement with an organization created in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina called the Center for Ethical and Social Justice Renewal. She was executive director and then co-director from 2012-2018. People coming to New Orleans to help with the restoration of the neighborhoods needed to learn about systemic racism in order to partner effectively with the community. The Center created justice education workshops for this purpose. Rev. Deanna also participated in offering anti-racism/anti-oppression workshops for Tulane University, LREDA (Liberal Religious Educators Association), and the UUMA (UU Ministers Association). Finally, she's a part of the Beloved Conversations Virtual design team—an anti-racism/anti-oppression curriculum grounded in UU values and offered through the Fahs Collaborative of Meadville Lombard Theological School.

The Unfolding Peace process will help our congregation learn to communicate faithfully when we have conflict and develop skillfulness in turning towards our conflicts with holy curiosity and compassion as they happen—naming systemic changes necessary for collective healing—and, someday, being able to address the harm as it happens. "One of our purposes is to recognize that the system isn't broken, it was designed that way (to be oppressive, racist, etc.). Also, when harm has been done, people need to be witnessed. They need to tell their stories until they feel they've been heard." Rev. Deanna hopes the congregation's work of unfolding peace together here can acknowledge the harm that's been done and make it possible for everyone to reclaim the gift of community and sanctuary that is First UU.

"As we witness to each other, we hope to create a dynamic peace. Each of us holds a piece of the story, not all of the story. Different understandings of what happened can coexist. This is a time to be gentle with ourselves and with each other. Finally, we need to develop a willingness to live into an unknowable future with trust in the process."

Listening Circles: Where We've Been & Where We're Going

by Listening Circles Planning Team

Thank you, thank you, thank you to all who were able to participate in our first phase of Listening Circles focused on reconnecting and healing from the past two challenging years. It wouldn't have been possible without:

- the 130 “sharing” participants (including facilitators);
- the ministerial support of Rev. Michael Brown, Rev. Omega Burckhardt, Rev. Deanna Vandiver, and Rev. Denise Graves;
- our wonderful facilitators (Tony Bianca, Marcia Biller, Jenner Daelyn, Marla English, Newt Ferris, Nancy Fisk, Andy French, Jan Garbosky, Valerie Jaques, Rose Riedel, Chris Smith, Rose Van Oss, and Les Vivian);
- Dan Paul who made all the circle assignments and aggregated the survey responses and recorder notes for all the Listening Circles; and
- Rev. Sarah Gibb Millspaugh, UUA Pacific Western Region Congregational Life staff person, who designed the facilitator training.

The last Listening Circle in this initial round took place on Sunday, January 23. More than 60 pages of anonymized responses from the 24 completed Listening Circles are being reviewed and analyzed by members of the Planning Team. Written responses from those who missed their Listening Circle or for whom zoom is not doable are also included.

The analysis will take some time, be summarized in a variety of ways, and reported back to the congregation, the Board, and ministers (including past and future Ministers in Residence and our Developmental Minister).

What We Learned About the Process: We heard loud and clear from participants and facilitators in our Listening Circles that the process was powerful, affirming, healing, and transformative.

People commented that our Listening Circles were safe spaces in which they could speak openly and with honesty. Trust was built by invoking a covenant and by having respectful listening. There was no commenting, no affirming or correcting, and no crosstalk. One of the two trained facilitators acted as scribe and listened, took anonymized notes, and read back those notes. The speaker then had an opportunity to correct, modify, adjust, and approve the notes before the next person was invited to speak. The rest of the circle bore a few seconds of silent witness to each participant's sharing. As we learned from participants' surveys completed after their Listening Circle, the process worked very well. The information gained from these Listening Circles will help our Board and committees get ready to work with our Developmental Minister and, also, help Rev. Deanna and Rev. Denise with designing the direction and activities of Unfolding Peace with us through 2022.

Moving Forward: Turning to the future, we envision Listening Circles can be a valuable tool for our community to use with other emerging congregational life matters—bearing witness to each other through “Reimagining our Covenant” and “Becoming a Radically Welcoming Community,” as well as other important issues.

With the success of this process as a tool for moving forward in 2022 and beyond, additional volunteers will be welcome. **Please let us know of your interest in being involved in future Listening Circles as a participant, facilitator, and/or organizing team member by completing the Interest Form at www.jotform.com/form/220236540882049**

Listening Circles Planning Team:

Rev. Deanna Vandiver, Rev. Denise Graves,
Rev. Dr. Omega Burckhardt, Dan Paul,
Jan Garbosky, Les Vivian,
Marla English & Susan Harding

Our Next Minister-in-Residence

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*



The Rev. Kathleen McTigue was UUSC's Director for Activism and Justice Education until her retirement in February 2021. She served both UUSC and the UUA as the first Director of the UU College of Social Justice from 2012 to 2020.

Before taking on these roles she was a parish minister for 25 years, serving in New Haven, CT and Winston-Salem, NC. In retirement Rev. McTigue continues her activism, focused especially on immigrant rights with the Boston Immigrant Justice Accompaniment Network (BIJAN). She lives in Boston with her husband, Nick Nyhart, and they are the parents of three adult children.

Spirit Level Foundation: A Source of Support for UU Congregations

by Lisa Schaffer

San Diego is the home of the Spirit Level Foundation, a nonprofit foundation established in 1997 specifically to support UU congregations in southern California, especially in San Diego. Since inception, over \$4 million has been given for projects that contribute to the health and growth of our denomination locally. To encourage generosity, Spirit Level requires applicants to raise matching funds, and regularly monitors the progress of funded projects. Spirit Level grants have helped with new facilities; upgrades to buildings, bathrooms, and parking lots; A/V equipment; and costs associated with UU the Vote, among other things, as well as supporting an intern minister at First UU in San Diego. When the COVID pandemic started, Spirit Level offered

special grants to help with needed technology updates and to mitigate other impacts.

The Spirit Level Board is looking at new innovative ways to help sustain and expand UU ministries, as well as continuing its traditional grant programs. The most recent call for proposals was sent in January, with proposals due April 1, for projects that support the growth of UU communities such as building or capital improvement projects. Congregations are also encouraged to think "outside the box" considering the evolving nature of UU communities and consider programs or other innovative efforts that will grow UU communities. For more information, please visit the Spirit Level website, www.spiritlevel.org

Music Lecture Series at First UU

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

Tony Bianca, our Program Director, led the choir online from May 2020 to July 2021. 15 people met regularly to rehearse and then record their parts. After about a year of quarantine, attendance dwindled until it was agreed to stop doing choir online. Tony wanted to fill the time on Wednesday evenings with something musical that didn't involve singing. He decided on a musical lecture series that happens once a month on Zoom.

"We're reinventing the way we do things in this time of pandemic. I decided to follow my bliss and create a music series that showcases Broadway musicals, based on a theme."

He feels Broadway is often a decade ahead of its time when dealing with social change and trends. Such subjects as sexual orientation, Latinx and Hispanic relationships, and other issues have all been treated on Broadway. "They have a way of capturing the essence of an issue with drama, poetry, music, and dance." All of those art forms are usually combined with the visual design of the stage.

In his musical lecture series, Tony researches what's out there on a particular theme, and decides what he'd like to highlight. He takes about a month to decide on the clips he wants to use. He looks for the original musicals, but he also wants to bring in new artists, and have a wider diversity of talent featured. He's expanded from Broadway to include operas and singers he finds interesting.

For Halloween, the lecture was about witches. He's done an evening on the Old Testament and one on the New Testament. He recently featured an evening of Sondheim, a Broadway composer and lyricist, who died recently and was deeply beloved by the Broadway

community.

One other thing that appeals to Tony about his series is the accessibility to almost everyone. You don't have to know anything about music to participate. You just need to appreciate the ways music expresses different emotions and issues. People who've moved from San Diego during the pandemic are able to participate.

Louise Titlow and her partner, Karen Kircher, have been loyal followers of the series. According to Karen, "It's always informative, delightful, and fun!" Louise says, "I learn wonderful things about different musical genres and I'm exposed to so much great music every time."

The series can evolve as we're allowed back to campus. Tony's already tried a hybrid of in-person and Zoom presentations. It can become adult education when the choir is back in person.

The next musical lecture will be on Wednesday, February 16th at 7 pm, featuring the theme of love. Look for the link in *The Window* and on our website, www.firstuusandiego.org.



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Rev. Kathleen McTigue, Minister in Residence
Rev. Dr. Omega Burckhardt, Assistant Minister
Rev. Jim Grant and Rev. Löne Broussard, Affiliate Ministers
Rev. Bonnie Tarwater, Rev. Frank Piccone-Willey, Rev. Julie Forest
and Rev. Katy Swanson, Affiliate Community Ministers
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Rose Riedel, Office Manager and Scheduler
Tony Bianca, Program Director
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Käthe Larick, Youth Programs Coordinator
Kate Collier, Program Assistant
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To view sermon video casts, click on these

YouTube or Vimeo buttons:



Giving: <https://www.firstuusandiego.org/giving.html>.

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