



First
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Church of San Diego

FirstWords

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Unfolding Peace: An Interview with Rev. Dr. Denise Graves

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

*This is part two of a series on Unfolding Peace, the organization that will be working with First UU for the next nine months. Part one, with Rev. Deanna Vandiver, was in the **February 2022 First Words**.*

Rev. Dr. Denise Graves has been an educator most of her life. Her journey includes eclectic geographic and cultural exposures along the California coastline, Pacific Northwest, Minnesota, the Midwest, and the deep south of Georgia. She now resides in New Orleans, Louisiana, and is in a position to, in community, unfold peace internationally.

Her purposed career includes work in Human Resources and Administration, from recruitment, selection, onboarding, and conflict resolution to negotiating contracts. While raising small children, she worked as a Nursing Home Administrator and gerontology instructor. She later went on to teach classroom education in primary, middle, secondary, and collegiate courses. The looming questions for her were: How do people learn and what are the informants for spiritual development, values clarification, and life guiding principles? In pursuit of answers, she followed the course of human development scholarship, diverse religious and spiritual education, and travels around the world. These journeys facilitated work as after-school tutorial instructor, multi-faith-based Organizer, Biblical and Spiritual Counselor, Coach, Chaplin, and Author, to name a few of her roles.



Rev. Denise is the founder of Peace Ministry, LLC, founded in 1995. The motto of the ministry is “to build relationships that heal and enhance the world.” While working as a Faith-Based Community Organizer and serving as a Youth Pastor, she first saw a need for a new type of ministry that serves the healing and education of youth.

In the early 1990s’ there was a rash of violence that left young people traumatized, harmed, and dead. Those youth knew more about violence than peace. Many were afraid to leave their homes or go to school. Most of them and their families never attended the church they passed daily. The church had a legacy of exclusion. Its remaining members were older and the population was declining. The new pastor and wife wanted to embrace this community neglected due to white flight. A small group of members offered to host listening sessions for families affected by the drive-by shootings. Some of the families brought their children. While the adults met, Denise met with the youth.

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Web of Community

by Rev. Kathleen McTigue, *Minister in Residence*



One of the things I love about New England is wandering in the old cemeteries, enjoying the stillness and sense of age, and reading the epitaphs on the weathered gravestones. One of the most startling ones I've ever seen—and poignant—is on a stone that's not all that old, for a man named Franklin Bailey who died in 1988 after a long life in the same community. His stone reads, "Here lies a man that nobody really knew."

What a strange, sad thing to put on a gravestone! There is suffering held in that short phrase, the suffering of isolation, loneliness, feeling invisible, and unheard. It seems to me our religious communities, at their best, offer an antidote to our isolation. They give us a place to push back against the myth of the rugged individual, both as it's preached in the culture around us and as we discover it internalized within us. That myth tells us that it's a weakness to depend on other people, that we should be able to make it on our own.

The truth is our lives are so deeply entwined, we hardly ever know for sure whether we're taking or giving. The truth is when we speak in honesty and when we listen with love, each one of us is made stronger, more clear-minded, and more compassionate. The truth is none of the famous people who have risen to the crest of the wave—not the saints or the teachers, the scientists or the artists, the politicians or the revolutionaries—not one of them gave us something created on their own, in isolation, cut off from the fabric of lives woven before or alongside their own. We're made to need each other, made to learn from one another, to give, to accept the giving, to trade places again and again. In our religious homes we can make that explicit, honor it, and proclaim it as the truth. The interdependent web begins here.

I'm among you here in San Diego for just six brief weeks, but in that time I, too, am part of this web of community. I look forward to hearing your stories and reflections, your questions and befuddlements, regrets and hopes. I'm glad for this chance to know you a little, and to be known!

Rev. Kathleen McTigue
Minister in Residence

March Sermon Messages

Worship Time:

Hillcrest Patio & Livestream Worship:
Sunday, 9:30 am - (ASL Interpretation)

RSVP to Attend In-Person Worship at:
<https://rsvp.church/r/0cQJU1PE>

Watch Worship Online at:
<https://www.firstuusandiego.org/>

March's Transformational Theme is: "The In-between"

March 6, 2022

"Living in the In-Between"

Rev. Kathleen McTigue, *Minister in Residence*

March 13, 2022

"Lobs and Rubies:

Marking Two Years of 'Pivot'"

Rev. Dr. Omega Burckhardt, *Assistant Minister*

March 20, 2022

"Saying Yes and Saying No"

Rev. Kathleen McTigue, *Minister in Residence*

March 27, 2022

"Detours and Back Roads"

Rev. Kathleen McTigue, *Minister in Residence*

Coming Back and Looking Ahead

by Tony Bianca, Program Director



We're back to gathering in person again and (fingers crossed) things seem to be on track to be able to start returning to more and more of the kind of Lifespan Programming we had prior to the pandemic. And while we know

"there's no going back" and there will be a "new normal," there's also both the desire and the intent to offer the kind of robust, diverse, and engaging Lifespan Education Programming that will help us grow into the kind of Beloved Community we aspire to be. So now that the possibilities are starting to, literally, open up again, what steps are we taking to move in that direction?

In the area of Children and Youth Religious Education (RE), we'll be continuing to offer programs on Sunday mornings in a more traditional "Sunday school" model. But, we'll also be looking for ways to grow our programming to include more opportunities for multi-generational experiences. Additionally, as is recommended in the Committee for Institutional Change's report "Widening the Circle of Concern," we'll be exploring how we might provide "significant opportunities for cross-cultural immersion through partnership and also use of videos, films, and other online

resources."

We also want to start rebuilding a more robust RE Program for Adults of all ages and stages of life. While we have quite a few affinity groups, special programs, and opportunities for connection for adults, it's been some time since we've had a more structured Adult RE Program, and that's something we hope to offer in the near future. After a few months of taking inventory of what we currently offer, we'll begin to look at what's missing and what we might do to fill in some of the gaps and expand our programming in new and exciting directions.

In addition to developing our Children's, Youth, and Adult RE Programs, I'll also be taking some time to focus on professional development in the form of official credentialing from the UUA. The UUA offers several levels of Religious Educator Credentialing and, as of this week, I've applied to begin the Master Level track. I'm excited for this opportunity to grow professionally and, also, for the ability it will afford me to connect with other UU education professionals from the larger fellowship.

I hope you're as excited as I am that things are ramping up again! I look forward to growing with you as we create and recreate a vital, diverse, and multi-generational Lifespan Program.



Unfolding Peace: An interview with Rev. Dr. Denise Graves Continued

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

The youth were happy someone cared about what was happening to them. The youth groups met on neighborhood corners, porches, and in the church basement. Based upon what they revealed, A Peace Vacation Bible Study was developed for teens. No one could predict what would happen. But each day more teens attended. So many came that the church decided to host Saturday Community Church in the basement.

Another more affluent church agreed to become a partner. That Saturday Community Church and Peace Vacation Bible School changed the way that congregation did church-welcoming community neighbors into full fellowship.

Peace Ministry evolved from that hot summer response to violence, trauma, and serial grief. The curriculum that taught Peace and Spiritual Development Training to teenagers was the catalyst for youth groups throughout the city. The teens the curriculum was designed for, kept coming back, asking for more. Rev. Denise realized her call was to help communities find that peace again, to heal what has been broken, to help people recover when they have been traumatized or their values and principles have been violated.

She brings to this work an eclectic mix of practices from many different faiths. Of the work that she and Rev. Deanna do together, she says, “We want to allow people to voice their concerns and be listened to with compassion. When people experience some aspect of woundedness, they hold on to it, and can’t release the woundedness, until they have an opportunity to talk it out.”

Rev. Denise was born and raised Pentecostal, taught by Franciscan monks, and went to several seminaries. She has a Master of Public Administration from the University of Kansas, and a Masters of Specialized Ministries and Social Justice from the St. Paul School of Theology. Rev. Denise has worked with The Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Reforms as an anti-racist dialogue facilitator, served as pulpit supply for several UU congregations for years as well as

served as a UU event chaplain and more.

She began working with Rev. Deanna because they traveled in similar circles. They have provided community grief care and support for a dear young organizer named George. They were in Congo Square together in New Orleans, to highlight the kidnapping of 200 women in Africa. She and Deanna made a decision to continue anti-racist dialogues in partnership. They have also preached together and have done community outreach together. Denise teaches spiritual leadership coaching and Deanna took her course.

When addressing a conflict, Rev. Denise’s main question is “How does your faith system speak to this issue? How are you spiritually informed about this conflict?” Her job is to hold a light up to the conflict. She believes that healing must be allowed its time. She also believes in the human spirit, that harm can be corrected without leaving the person feeling assaulted again. “People need to know that the behavior is unacceptable but the person is always loved. What we’re seeking is having our principles in alignment with our experience.”

On living in right relationship: “Justice is right relationship. Freedom is a right; liberation is your responsibility. Education is a right; learning is your responsibility.” There are rights you are entitled to as a human being, and then there is what you must do to work towards those rights.

Finally, Rev. Denise says, “We have to evolve; we should never try to be the same. We need to look at the process, create the mechanism that will help us in the healing, allowing people to have voice and putting protocols in place to deal with conflicts in the future. Some relationships will be healed and restored. Some will have mutual respect but decide to be separate.”

Rev. Denise and Rev. Deanna will be with us for the next nine months to help us work towards healing the harm we’ve experienced in the last two years and help us find ways to more fully live our principles as a community.

Developmental Ministry at First UU

by Cora Pendergast, *Board Vice President*

Developmental Ministry is a UUA program that matches congregations with ministers to solve specific institutional problems. A Developmental Ministry is a good fit for congregations that have experienced upheavals or conflict and are seeing a need for deep institutional change. You can read about the program and how it differs from interim ministry here: [UU World Article](#)

The article, published in 2014, states a Developmental Ministry length of 3 - 5 years. That has since been increased to 4 - 7 years.

Candidates for Developmental Ministry are very experienced senior ministers. They're specifically interested in working with congregations that are experiencing challenges and a need for change. The UUA staff work closely with the ministerial search team to identify strong candidates based on the congregation's needs and goals. Our new Developmental Minister will be the Lead Minister and will fulfill the functions of that role.

Some wonder why the Board of Trustees made the decision to pursue Developmental Ministry. We entered the 2021-22 church year with no Interim Minister in place and worked with the UUA to identify a series of temporary Ministers in Residence to provide worship services, pastoral care, and congregational support through June 2022. We're appreciative of the skilled and compassionate Ministers in Residence who are working on-site with our congregation this year.

The Board then turned to the question of ministerial hiring for the 2022-23 church year and beyond. Big concerns were the timing of getting a stable ministry in place and how to best meet the needs of a congregation reeling from the fallout and pain of the Interim Search

Committee issues from spring of 2021. The Board saw two hiring options.

The first was to hire a two-year Interim Minister for August 2022 through July 2024, with a called minister on board starting August 2024. At the time the decision was made, that meant a total of three years without a longer-term ministry in place.

The second option was to contract a Lead Senior Minister for 4 to 7 years of Developmental Ministry beginning in August 2022. This would give First UU 4 to 7 years with a highly experienced Lead Senior Minister who would work with us on specific congregational goals and prepare us to call a long-term settled minister.

In November 2021, after discussions with UUA Regional Staff and two special Board Chats to discuss the topic and hear congregational input, the Board of Trustees voted to pursue the Developmental Ministry approach. You can watch videos of the special Board Chats after logging into the Members Portal of our website.

In December, an email to congregants asked for search team recommendations. After reviewing suggestions, a search team was selected consisting of Cora Pendergast, Erik Kaestner, Isaac Castro, Karen Lamphere, and Scott GrantSmith. The team is dedicated to selecting a new Lead Minister who will best meet the needs of the entire congregation in working towards our goals.

The search team anticipates that the process will be complete and an announcement made regarding the new minister in early April. First UU 's Developmental Ministry will begin in August.

To read about the goals, see the Developmental Ministry Goals article in this issue.

First UU Congregational Goals for Developmental Ministry

Defining congregational goals is part of the Developmental Ministry search process. These goals are a starting point to let Developmental Minister candidates know what we feel we need to focus on. The goals are commonly refined, clarified, or otherwise changed as the new minister works with the congregation.

Working with UUA regional staff, a set of goals was defined based on information from First UU Listening Circles, Funding our Future meetings, and direct experience with the congregation. In early January 2022, an online survey was sent to congregants to obtain feedback about the goals. Respondents were asked to rate each goal's importance to the long-term health of the congregation on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). Open ended questions asked whether any important issues were missed in the listed goals, and for ideas about the desired characteristics of a Developmental Minister.

114 people responded. The information gathered in the survey is being used as part of the ministerial search process.

In ranked order, from highest (4.5) to lowest (3.3), the goals are:

- Rebuild trust and community through a re-covenanting process that defines how we want to be together as a congregation
- Develop a plan for ensuring First UU's financial sustainability
- Develop infrastructure (such as a revitalized Good Relations Committee) for people with conflicting ideas and needs to safely engage in conversation and resolution
- Live into the 8th principle by becoming a fully welcoming and inclusive community
- Evaluate our governance structure and revise as needed to support our congregation's diverse needs and goals
- Right-size our programs and staffing
- Decide whether to remain on our Hillcrest campus or sell the property and relocate
- Explore how to build deeper connections between our two campuses

Additional issues listed by congregants included:

- Congregational growth (more outreach, create tools to boost membership)
- More community building within the church and with the larger community
- Nurture/foster spiritual growth; balance spiritual practices and social justice activities
- More/better communication between the Board of Trustees and the congregation
- More opportunities for reflective listening
- More engagement with BIPOC communities and congregants
- More transparency; adherence to and clarification of policies
- More robust Religious Education program (all ages)
- More small groups (e.g., women, couples) and better support of small groups

Characteristics desired in our new Minister:

- Compassion / empathy / thoughtfulness / warmth / inspiring / open-minded
- Good listener
- Provide spiritual and pastoral care
- Good organization/business skills; understanding of finances
- Ability to prioritize, be strategic, make difficult decisions
- Good communication skills
- Community builder / bring people together / rebuild trust
- Innovator / visionary
- Not conflict-averse / strong / self-aware
- Experience with similar congregations
- Diversity
- Familiarity / experience with conflict resolution and facilitating restorative practices
- Leadership skills / ability to help others succeed
- Experience with anti-oppression / racial justice work
- Ability to balance spiritual goals and social action

Together Again: A Pictorial

by Nancy Fisk & Rose Riedel from *In-Person Worship* February 27, 2022



"Music, sermons... it all hits differently when we're together." ~ Bella Furth



"It was really nice to see people I haven't seen in a while." ~ Nancy Fisk



*"In this moment of togetherness in this physical space, I am reminded of the ways I first fell in love with our community."
~ Rose Riedel*



"It's great to be back!" ~ Joanne Williams



"The service was really good! It's lovely to see people - and I'm not used to it." ~ Caroline Clark



"It was lovely to be in person, and it was lovely to be outdoors! I'm getting tired of sitting at a computer indoors." ~ Liz Jones

Staff

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
Robie Evans, Director of Operations
Rose Riedel, Office Manager and Scheduler
Tony Bianca, Program Director
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ONLINE email & Web Addresses

First Words Editor & Submissions, Nancy Fisk:
nfisk1@juno.com

To be added to the E-mail List:
firstwords@firstuusandiego.org

Scheduling of Church Property Requests:
schedule@firstuusandiego.org

The Window submissions (Church bulletin):
[window@firstuusandiego.org](mailto>window@firstuusandiego.org)

Care Network: carenetwork@firstuusandiego.org


First Church Web Sites:

Main Website: <http://www.firstuusandiego.org>

South Bay Campus:

<https://www.firstuusandiego.org/south-bay-campus.html>

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**First
Unitarian Universalist
Church of San Diego**

4190 Front Street (GPS use 298 W Arbor Drive)
San Diego, CA 92103-2098

Phone: 619-298-9978

E-mail: mail@firstuusandiego.org

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
First Words, 4190 Front Street, San Diego, CA 92103