



First  
Unitarian Universalist  
Church of San Diego

# FirstWords

Our Monthly Magazine

April 2023; Vol 17 No. 4

## Nadia Bolz-Weber – First UU 150th Anniversary Speaker

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

Nadia Bolz-Weber, public theologian, will be at First UU on April 1 at 7:30 pm, as part of the 150th anniversary celebration, speaking about Progressive Religion. Her presentation continues in the tradition of open forums First UU held on controversial topics in the 1950's. The talk is free but registration is necessary. Sign up [HERE](#).

Nadia grew up in Colorado Springs in a fundamentalist Christian family. She attended Pepperdine University briefly before dropping out and then moving to Denver. She says she became an alcoholic and drug abuser and often felt like one of "society's outsiders."

By 1991, Bolz-Weber became sober and, as of 2020, has remained so for 28 years. Prior to her ordination, she was a stand-up comedian and worked in the restaurant industry. In 1996, Nadia married Matthew Bolz-Weber, whom she had met while in recovery. They divorced in 2016. Together, they have two children, a daughter and a son.

Bolz-Weber felt called to service in 2004 when she was asked to eulogize a friend who had committed suicide. In 2008, Bolz-Weber was ordained as a pastor. She started her own church, the House for All Sinners and Saints—the name of which is often shortened to just "House." Her work in the church is considered part of "a new Reformation" by scholar and writer Diana Butler Bass.

Bolz-Weber is known for her unusual approach to reaching others through her church. Heavily tattooed, she's considered a "performative pastor." She began to acquire tattoos in 1986 at age 17. Those present on her arms mark the liturgical year and the story of the Gospel.



Because one third of her church is part of the LGBT community, she created a position, "Minister of Fabulousness," held by Stuart, a drag queen. Her church is very welcoming to people with drug addiction, depression, and even those who are not believers of her faith. Bolz-Weber spends nearly twenty hours each week writing her weekly ten-minute sermon.

She resigned as minister of the House for All Sinners and Saints in 2018, to become a full-time public theologian, but the church continues to do the work she began. Find out more information about the House for All Saints and Sinners [HERE](#)

Bolz-Weber writes on Christianity and other topics. Her books include *Salvation on the Small Screen - 24 Hours of Christian Television*, *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint*, and *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People*. In 2019, she published *Shameless: A Sexual Reformation*.

Nadia Bolz-Weber was installed on August 20, 2022, as the first pastor of public witness for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). She was called to the role of pastor of public witness by the ELCA's Rocky Mountain Synod.

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## What We Can Count On

by Rev. Justine Sullivan, *Lead Minister*



Last year around this time, I told a New England colleague I'd be heading to San Diego to serve as your lead developmental minister. She said, "I could never leave New England because I preach so much about the weather – What would I talk about?!" I confess I had some similar trepidation; how would I talk about the seasons? *Is there a spring, a fall, a winter?* I wondered. Of course, I'm now learning there are indeed seasons here in San Diego—more than four, in fact! I'm not

always sure if a change that's happening in the weather is the beginning of a new season or just a blip, and I guess I won't really know about that until I have been through a few winters, springs, etc.

It strikes me we're all in that same space of not quite knowing. Are we emerging from the time of the pandemic, or will there be another surge, another variant? When will it finally be behind us? The truth is we just don't know, and in fact, we're finding that we may never go back to exactly the way things were. And that's not all bad.

We've found we can do many things online, and we've also learned and re-learned that something happens when we gather. Whenever possible we try to be in each other's presence, and, for those who can't be physically present, we work extra hard to make the online experience as human as possible. These are good things, good changes... good but not always easy.

We're creatures of habit, and we like to know what we can count on. This is part of our work together, my dear ones—figuring out truly what we can count on. Who are we meant to be in the world? What promises do we wish to make and renew, and how will we respond when we fall short? We say these words each week in worship, we acknowledge that sometimes we fall short. In recent weeks we've been saying that particular line of our welcome in Spanish, but we'll alternate between what's offered in English and Spanish so that we all get to hear those important words, the recognition that as imperfect beings, we sometimes fall short.

My favorite line from the Rumi text that we sing as "Come, Come Whoever You Are" is one that's not often sung, "Though you've broken your vows a thousand times." Even though you and we all have *broken our vows a thousand times*, still we invite one another *come, yet again come*.

So many good things coming up in the next several weeks: the evening with Nadia Bolz-Weber, Easter and flower communion, many more events in honor of our 150th celebration, and time together in all the ways that we can be together. Come, come whoever you are and be welcomed!

In faith and service,

*Justine*

## April Sermon Schedule

### April's Transformational Theme: "Resistance"

#### Hillcrest Worship Time:

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

**April 2, 2023**

**"Acts of Resistance: On the back of a donkey"**

Rev. Justine Sullivan, *Lead Minister*

**April 9, 2023**

**"Flower Communion"**

Rev. Justine & Rev. Dr. Omega

**April 16, 2023**

Rev. Sadie Landsdale, *Guest Minister*

**April 23, 2023**

**"Earth Day"**

Jose Franco Garcia & Rev. Dr. Omega

**April 30, 2023**

Rev. Justine Sullivan, *Lead Minister*

#### South Bay Worship Time:

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

**April 2, 2023**

**"Divine Dirt: Passover, Easter, and Religious Naturalism"**

Rev. Dr. Omega Burckhardt, *Assistant Minister*

**April 16, 2023**

**"Moving from Ally to Accomplish"**

Rev. Dr. Omega Burckhardt, *Assistant Minister*

# We Are A Covenantal Community and the Use of the Democratic Process

by Tony Bianca, *Director of Lifespan Faith Formation*



This month, I'd like to continue my discussion of Article II and focus on a topic that's come up at several discussions I've been present for, namely, the concern around what is perceived as the loss of our 5th Principle: "The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large."

In my reading of the commission's report, that Principle isn't lost, just "redistributed," if you will (and the report itself addresses this on page 24). I see the 5th Principle in the definition of Pluralism ("We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning") and again in the definition of Justice ("We support the use of inclusive democratic processes to make decisions").

With this said, however, I do see a broader shift in the way the commission talks about who we are as an organization, and, in my opinion, this shift is a more accurate reflection of who and what we are. In short, there is a shift away from centering the idea that we are a "democracy" and toward the idea that we are a "covenantal community." In part, I think this shift is a recognition of the fact that, as Rev. Justine put it, "Democracy is necessary but not sufficient."

To be sure, democratic principles and processes have vastly improved the world. And it's also

true that slavery, Jim Crow, the mass genocide of indigenous peoples, and a host of other injustices have all happened in our democracy. As I've shared before, I've been in the position of standing at a polling place in Maryland to ask people to vote on my ability to marry the person I chose. So, while I value our democratic processes, I'm also aware that they have the potential of establishing a tyranny of the majority in ways that are contrary to our Faith and its values.



So, as I read the proposed revision of Article II, I don't see our democratic principles going away. Rather, I see them woven into the fabric of how we understand ourselves—but done in a way that recognizes democratic principles are a tool for becoming who we

aspire to be, rather than an end in themselves, or as a central way of understanding ourselves as a community.

In a democracy, we're asked to vote our consciences as a means of deciding who we are. In a covenantal community, we are asked to begin with who we are—the values, relationships, and responsibilities that hold us in community—and, sometimes, vote on how to best live out our covenant.

I hope this can be an invitation to deeper conversation about our Principles, Values, and Article II. I look forward to continuing to write about and discuss these issues as we move toward engaging democratically with our larger faith community at General Assembly.

# A Place At The Nayarit: A Conversation with Author Natalia Molina

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*



Natalia Molina, a member of First UU from 2009 to 2018, was a 2020 recipient of the MacArthur Genius Grant. She was given the award because of her work around race and immigration and has written several books on the subject.

On April 30, she'll be in conversation at the Hillcrest campus with Isabella (Bella) Furth, who helped edit her most recent book, a memoir/history titled, "A Place at the Nayarit: How a Mexican Restaurant Nourished a Community" (University Press, 2022). Natalia explores the ways immigrants created community through a deep dive into the story of the restaurants founded by her grandmother, Doña Natalia Barraza, the woman she was named after.

The restaurants were all named "Nayarit," after the state in Mexico where her grandmother was from. The memoir intertwines the history of Los Angeles with the history of immigration and racial formation there. Because the restaurants were near Dodger Stadium, downtown, and Hollywood, the patrons were often baseball players, musicians, and local political folks. The original restaurant was in Echo Park, a place where gays, liberal whites, ethnic Mexicans, (both Mexican-Americans, and immigrants) lived alongside other immigrants, learning to be

comfortable in communities outside their racial and ethnic groups.

Natalia's grandmother came to the United States in the 1920s, started her first restaurant in the late 1940s and, in 1951, founded the Nayarit that is the focus of this book. There are extensive interviews with the customers to the restaurant, the people who worked there, neighbors of the family, and her mother's good friends, that together tell the human story of the restaurant. Natalia paints a portrait of her grandmother as an ambitious, independent, practical and complex woman, who was a great success, in spite of not being formally educated and never speaking more than a few words of English.

Doña Natalia sponsored many relatives, friends, and other hometown connections who wanted to immigrate to the United States. The book explores the processes people follow to become American and in the process, challenges assumptions about why people immigrate here. Some of the people Doña Natalia sponsored came to find a new home or to escape a difficult situation. But others came to have an adventure, make some money, and then head back to Mexico. Doña Natalia was remarkably progressive, employing and sponsoring servers and cooks who were gay, at a time when that was a closely guarded secret.

Nayarit is on the west coast of Mexico, and the restaurants specialized in food from that region, primarily seafood. Bella says the food is described so vividly, she sometimes had to stop editing to get something to eat. The book is a portrait of a restaurant, a family, a community, and the city of Los Angeles in the '50s and '60s. Anyone who has spent time in Los Angeles will enjoy this book.

Come to the Hillcrest Campus on April 30th to enjoy the conversation between Natalia and Bella and to hear more about "A Place at the Nayarit."

# The Flower Communion

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

*Excerpts in this story are from a service written by Reginald Zottoli, posted at [uua.org](http://uua.org)*

The Flower Communion at Easter is a tradition we've been following at First UU for years. Each person attending the service brings flowers to contribute to the ritual. During the service, everyone comes forward and chooses a different flower than the one they brought. This ritual was created by a Unitarian minister from Czechoslovakia, Norbert Čapek.

Norbert Čapek (1870-1942) was born a Roman Catholic but became disillusioned with the church and was ordained a Baptist minister, traveling widely in Europe. With his wife Marie and their eight children, he emigrated to the United States in 1914. Marie died soon after they arrived there. He met his second wife, Maja, in New York City. She urged him to leave the Baptist ministry and join Unitarianism. They returned to Czechoslovakia in 1921. Maja was ordained in 1926.

He and Maja founded the Unitarian Church in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Čapek created the Flower Communion because he felt the need for a special ritual for his congregation that would bind them more closely together as a community. The format had to be one that wouldn't alienate any who had come from other religious traditions. So, he turned to the native beauty of their countryside for elements of a communion that would be genuine to them. He introduced the ritual to that church on June 3, 1923.

Before the service, each member would bring a flower to the church, where it was placed in a large central vase. At the end of the service, each would take home a different flower. This symbolized the contributions of each individual, and the coming together in communion to share this uniqueness. It was such a success, it was held yearly before the summer recess of the church.

Although he was invited to return to the United States during World War II, Čapek chose to remain in Europe. In 1939, Maja went to the US to raise funds for relief efforts in Czechoslovakia, where she introduced the flower communion to Unitarian churches there. She also served as minister in the North Unitarian Church in New Bedford, Massachusetts from 1940 to 1943. When the war broke out, she was unable to return to Czechoslovakia. She found out after the war that her husband had died in Dachau, a concentration camp in Germany.

The ritual has spread to our UU congregations and has been adapted along the way. On the 100th anniversary of the creation of this ritual, let us remember the significance of this communion—that as no two flowers are alike, no two people are alike, yet each has a contribution to make. Together the different flowers form a beautiful bouquet. Our common bouquet would not be the same without the unique addition of each individual flower. Thus it is with our church community. It wouldn't be the same without each and every one of us.

*On Easter Sunday, April 9, before the service, please bring flowers, bought or from your own garden, for our Flower Communion and leave them in the baskets provided outside the Meeting House.*



# A Village of Cottages

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

Iris-Ann Decelles, a member of First UU, has been helping to build houses in Tijuana for 18 years. Kathy Faller from the UU Fellowship of San Dieguito (UUFSD) got her started. Kathy and UUFSD created a non-profit called Casas de Luz, which provides housing for people in Mexico. There's a special fund through the San Dieguito UU Fellowship for any monies they raise to support Casas de Luz. The houses are sponsored by individuals or groups and are built in a day and a half. They present the key to the house in a ceremony to the person who becomes the homeowner.

In 2020, COVID put a halt to traveling to Mexico for Iris-Ann. When Kathy talked to her about building temporary housing for the homeless here in San Diego County, she agreed to sponsor that effort. Iris-Ann describes Kathy as a go-getter, someone who makes dreams happen and that it's been fantastic working with her.

For San Diego County, they decided on the idea of building temporary transitional housing, or sleeping cottages. The first one was portable and able to be towed behind a truck. Up to 30 cottages on a single site would be considered a "village." Anyone who uses the housing would only be able to stay there for 6 months.



Currently, Casas de Luz has commitments to building these "villages" on three different sites. Each village will have a theme—refugees, at risk youth, etc. They'll also have an operator, or an agency, that provides services to help the residents find jobs, permanent housing, etc.

Each cottage is 100 square feet, with 2 windows and a door, but no plumbing. At one village, they are partnering with an agency that provides showers and toilets for the homeless during the day, that can park their vehicles at the village at night.

The village Iris-Ann is sponsoring is for at-risk LGBTQ youth that have just left foster care or are in danger of living on the streets. It's based at a church in North County, whose congregation agreed without hesitation to allow the village on their property. Casas de Luz will provide a place for them to stay for six months, while they work on goals they have for their lives such as pursuing a GED, finding part-time work, getting counseling, etc.

Casas de Luz is working with an agency in Oceanside, the North County LGBTQ Center, whose executive director is Max Disposti. The agency will provide case managers, career counseling, and life skills programs for the residents of the village. People will begin living in the village in May.

Iris-Ann looks on these cottages and the programs that will benefit the people living there as her legacy. It fits the profile of what she's been doing for the last several years, taking care of people and making sure they have a place to stay and the resources to pursue their dreams.

Kathy says, "The people building the homes get as much out of it as the people receiving them." Casas de Luz is always in need of sponsors and volunteers to build their homes in Mexico and cottages in San Diego. Contact [casasdeluz.org](https://casasdeluz.org) for more information.


# San Diego Children's Choir in concert with the Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir

**5-6 pm Sunday, April 2nd, 2023**

A collaborative evening of spectacular singing  
by children and youth under the age of 18  
from San Diego and Oakland.

First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego  
298 W Arbor Street, San Diego, CA 92103



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Reserve your seats at [FirstUUSanDiego.org](https://www.FirstUUSanDiego.org)



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