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FirstWords

Our Monthly Magazine

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UUA President Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt at First UU November 19th

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

As part of our 150th anniversary celebration, The Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt will be speaking from our pulpit on November 19th. She is the tenth president of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and was elected in June 2023. As president of the Association, she is responsible for administering staff and programs that serve its more than 1,000 member congregations. She also acts as principal spokesperson and minister-at-large for the UUA.



recently served as Resident Scholar and Special Advisor on Justice and Equity at the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

Rev. Dr. Betancourt has contributed to the education of future faith leaders at Yale Divinity School, Starr King School for the Ministry, and Drew University Theological School, teaching courses on topics such as ministerial leadership, theologies, womanism and

Earth justice, and combatting oppression.

Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt's twenty-year ministry has included serving as a parish minister, seminary professor, scholar and environmental ethicist, and public theologian. Rooted in her lived identities as a queer, multiracial, AfroLatine first-generation daughter of immigrants from Chile and Panamá, Rev. Dr. Betancourt has already helped Unitarian Universalism live further into its commitments to be a radically welcoming, counter-oppressive, pluralistic faith movement.

Her own scholarship focuses on environmental ethics of liberation in a womanist and Latina feminist frame. She holds Ph.D., M.A., and M.Phil. degrees in Religious Ethics and African American Studies from Yale University, an M.Div. from Starr King School for the Ministry, and a B.S. from Cornell University with a concentration in ethnobotany. Rev. Dr. Betancourt is the author of *Ecowomanism at the Panamá Canal: Black Women, Labor, and Environmental Ethics* (2022). She lives in the Washington, DC, area.

In addition to her many years of service as Director of the UUA's Office of Racial and Ethnic Concerns and on many denominational leadership bodies, she also has previous experience with the role of president—in early 2017 she was appointed interim co-president to finish a vacated term, making her the first woman to lead the Unitarian Universalist Association. She most

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Our Shared Ministry

by Rev. Kristen Kuriga, *Assistant Minister*



I'm grateful to be engaged in this shared ministry with you. Thank you for your warm welcome, support, encouragement, and inspiration over the last three months. As I reflect on this time of becoming one of your Ministers, there are a few things I want to share.

It's a time of loss. We've said goodbye to too many members and friends, and now a dearly beloved Minister Emerita. It's a tender time. Amid this grief, I see you showing up for one another offering companionship, sharing stories, tears, and laughter. This is what really matters. Our relationships and our care for one another. May we continue to offer our loving presence to one another as we honor our beloved dead.

It's also a time of beauty. As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of First UU, and the 15th anniversary of the South Bay Campus, there's so much to celebrate! The South Bay Quinceañera was pure joy. A colorful timeline of our history, sharing food and fellowship as the sun set, mariachi music, laughing children gathering up candy from the piñata, and friends dancing into the night. One of the things that moved me was seeing members from the South Bay worshipping community, the Hillcrest campus, and the South Bay Food Pantry celebrating together. For we truly are one congregation.

We're reinvigorating our shared ministry. At a Worship Arts Retreat just a few weeks ago, thirty members of the church gathered with staff to learn together how to craft a worship service. It was a powerful and moving day, culminating in leading worship together on Sunday. I loved hearing so many different voices from the pulpit and coming together as a pick-up choir to offer the postlude, a parting blessing of "Peace, Salaam, Shalom." I'm excited about deepening this creative collaboration in worship.

Finally, it's a time of longing for what comes next. Many of you have spoken to me about the desire to take the next step on our path towards healing as a congregation. I'm looking forward to our focus on covenant this year. Of having deep conversations about how we want to be with one another and the promises we're willing to make to each other. Thank you for inviting me into your lives and into this shared ministry.

Rev. Kristen

November Sermon Schedule

November's Transformational Theme:
"Generosity"

Hillcrest Worship Time:

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

November 5, 2023

"We Remember Them"

Rev. Justine Sullivan, *Lead Minister*

November 12, 2023

"Veteran's Day"

Rev. Kristen Kuriga, *Assistant Minister*

November 19, 2023

"UUA President Sofía Betancourt"

Rev. Sofia Betancourt, *UUA President*

November 26, 2023

Swamini Saraswati, *Intern Minister*

South Bay Worship Time:

Sundays, 10 am, Suite 104

November 5, 2023

**"Service of Remembrance /
Dia de los muertos"**

Rev. Kristen Kuriga, *Assistant Minister*

November 12, 2023

"Diwali"

Rev. Justine Sullivan & Swamini Saraswati

November 19, 2023

"UUA President Sofía Betancourt"

Livestream of the Hillcrest Service

November 26, 2023

Livestream of the Hillcrest Service

Loss and Connection

by Tony Bianca, *Director of Lifespan Faith Formation*



There's been quite a lot of death and loss recently, both in our world at large and within our congregation. Recently, I took a moment to pause and reflect on the impact individual lives can have, and how that provides a lens through which we can all see our work with our children and

youth.

Without naming names for fear of leaving someone beloved out, our congregation has experienced the loss of some quite amazing people. People who went to other countries and provided care, people who worked tirelessly for social justice both here and abroad, people who offered radical welcome to those abandoned by their families and religious communities, people who broke through unjust barriers, and people who, when told it couldn't or shouldn't be done, said, "watch me do it!"

They were also people who shined a more gentle light in quieter, more human, everyday ways. They were poets, educators, confessors, leaders, musicians, parents, spouses and friends.

While I feel their loss deeply, it's also caused me to think about the children and youth I work with. These small ones in our midst have not only benefited from the presence of such shining examples of our principles so passionately lived, but are also those who, one hopes, will be the amazing elders of some future, yet-to-be-born generation.

That voice that breaks the silent moment of meditation on Sunday might one day be raised to speak truth to power. That bundle of energy in Sunday RE might one day be unleashed upon a world in desperate need of its transformative

power. Those teenaged eyes that roll in derision might one day make "justice roll down like waters, and peace like an ever-flowing stream."

As we wrap up our 150th anniversary year, I'm reminded of what a rich and powerful legacy we have been gifted! I'm also reminded that legacies are meant to be passed on, but the question is often, "how?" Usually, this yearning for more time to make connections across generations comes from our elders. It's typically expressed in the form of questions about how we might craft the ideal program where that connection can be facilitated. While these more formal opportunities are certainly worth investing our time in, I think we're overlooking opportunities to make those connections in the moment.

I've seen new connections across generations start to bloom already this year in our Coming-of-Age program. But I've also seen them on the patio, at social hours, and even in worship. While they sometimes involve conversations, they often happen simply through choices about proximity. Someone chooses to sit in a different spot during worship - a spot closer to where a family is sitting - to simply say "Good morning!" or inquire about what a child is drawing.

They happen on the patio when someone chooses to sit on the bench by the round table and chalkboard where the children congregate. The connection might only last for a moment, and usually doesn't involve anything profound - it's just a moment when lives briefly intersect. But those moments add up and, eventually, people begin to see the others as part of their world - as regular cast members in the story of their life.

I hope, as we enter our 151st year and beyond, we can live deeply into the legacy we have inherited and continue to pass it on. I hope we go out of our way to honor those who have gone before us and nurture those growing in our midst. And I hope that we take those small opportunities to build connections that both nourish and sustain us.

Everardo Aguilar, First UU Board President

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

Everardo Aguilar is the First UU Board President, for 2023-2024. Everardo came to First UU in August of 1986. He'd been a friend at the Unitarian Society in Santa Barbara, where he went to college. He came to participate in a group called Mixed Company, a group of straight and LGBTQ+ people who met at the church. One of the people he knew there was the Rev. Frank Robertson, the Religious Education director for the Santa Barbara church.

His first UU service was at Easter, where they played tracks from Jesus Christ Superstar. Upon hearing those songs, he knew he'd found his place. When he moved to San Diego, Frank referred him to George Kaufmann, First UU's Religious Education (RE) director. Everardo was in law school and rode the No. 3 bus to First UU. He joined the Gay Lesbian Outreach group (GLO) that met before the Sunday service. Later he became chair of the group, which prompted him to join the church council, a group of committee chairs at First UU. He was the first representative from GLO on the council.

Then he became involved with the 2- and 3-year olds in Religious Education. Later he served on the Children's RE Committee for 10 years. Another of his interests was Looking Glass Theater, where he participated in their production of "Reflection on a Fable." A photo of him in this role is in the book, *Living Liberal Religion*, by Jim Boone.

Later, Everardo worked with youth in the program About Your Sexuality, which became Our Whole Lives (OWL), the UU sexuality curriculum. This was at a time when AIDS was the number one cause of death among adults

24-45. He wanted to promote healthy sexuality and a positive sexual identity for youth and young adults.



Finally, he served for many years as the Envoy for the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office. He helped run the international food fair, which later evolved into a haunted house that raised money for UNICEF. There were years they raised over \$1,000 for UNICEF.

When asked to become Board President he said yes because he felt First UU was at a point, coming out of COVID, with ministers stepping down, that strong Board members were needed to help the congregation

through the turmoil. Everardo feels his strength is listening to others without judging. People trust him to act with integrity to find the answers to their questions. This is also a great time to transition to a new normal after the upheaval of the pandemic. The 150th anniversary celebration is winding down this year, and he's hoping people are feeling more confident about First UU.

Everardo grew up Catholic, but didn't have a strong church connection. When he found Unitarian Universalism, it came at an important time, when "it literally saved my life." When he came here for law school, knowing no one, this congregation and the people here became a great safety net. First UU has since become a great source of joy for him.

He wants others to feel that joy in coming to church. He wants people to find church fun. He feels that we are not just surviving, but that we are incredibly vital as a community. He hopes to help the church embody that vitality with his presidency.

The River of Life and the Memorial Garden

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

The River of Life, a brick walkway connecting the Memorial Wall (the Tree of Life) to the Memorial Garden at First UU, is being constructed this fall. The element of water is present in the poetry that will appear on the walls and in the design of the Memorial Garden. The River of Life extends that metaphor. This was proposed by artist and designer Jerry Thielbolt, in the original plans for the Memorial Garden, as a way to connect to the two structures that memorialize those members of First UU who have died.

Construction of the walkway began in late August 2023, and is still progressing, supervised by Jerry. Others working on the walkway include Ray Evans, Cristina and Luis Rivera, and David Sanders.

When the Tree of Life Memorial wall was first conceived in 1978, which Jerry worked on in partnership with the original artist, Rhoda Lopez, it was not known how long it would take to fill up the wall with names and subscribed bricks. That happened in 1993. The Memorial

Garden was designed in 2004. The six walls of the Memorial Garden were dedicated in January 2018.

Jerry admires the sense of community that exists at First UU and wanted to find a way for the congregation to participate in the construction of the River of Life. With that in mind, in spring of 2018, congregants created the bricks for the walkway from forms and stamps that were provided by Jerry. Bricks created by congregants will be marked with a red dot. A book with photos of the bricks and their creators is available in the library.

The dedication of the River of Life will happen soon. You'll be notified through our newsletter, the Window, and in a global email. If you'd like to have a brick that memorializes you or a loved one on one of the walls in the Memorial Garden, the cost is \$350 for each brick, and will go towards funding each wall. The brick has the name, the birth year and year of death of the person being recognized. Contact Robie@firstuusandiego.org for more information.



The Role of our Right Relations Team

by Marla English

Covenant is Latin for "come together" and means a "solemn agreement" or "promise from the heart."

Your Right Relations Team is a group of lay leaders who covenant to help each of us live up to our "solemn agreement" to practice faithful communication and creative conflict based on UU values of mutuality and respect.

As a team, we have "come together" to:

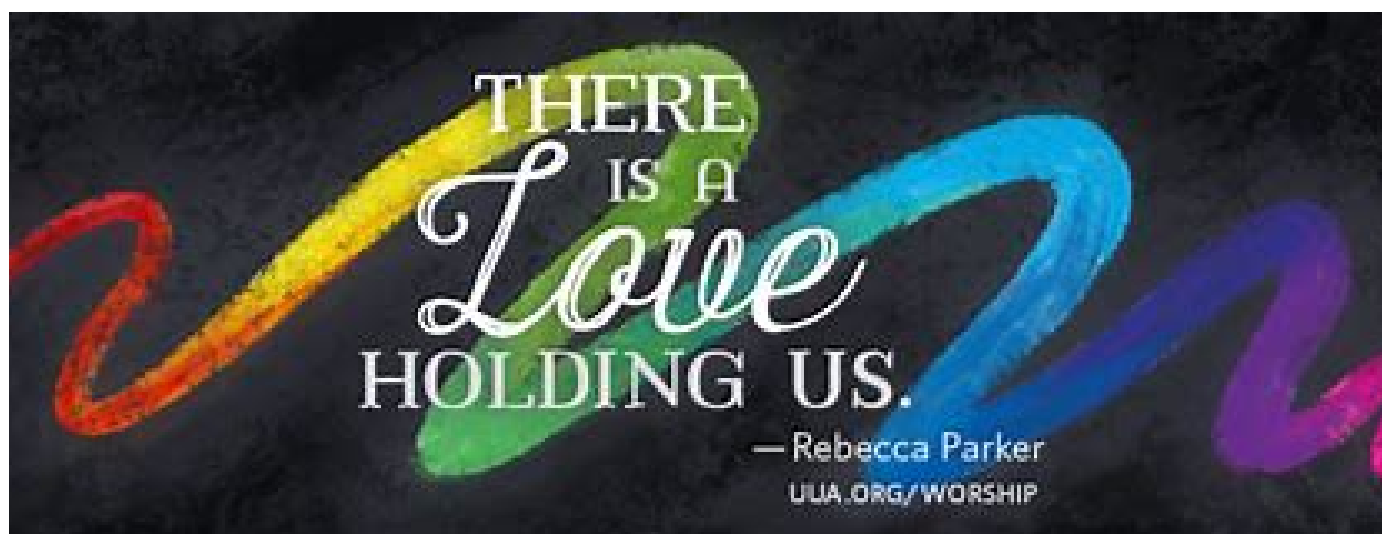
- Create a vision about how we want to be with one another in our congregation
- Review and revise our First UU Covenant and our Conflict Resolution Guidelines. (We're committed to articulating and modeling those practices.)
- Plan trainings and other learning opportunities around the tensions inevitable in growth and change. Right now, First UU's Adult Religious Education Program is planning a workshop on "Befriending Practices" that will be available to leaders and congregants.
- Facilitate the creation of new ways to communicate, even when we disagree.
- Create restorative processes so when conflict does arise in our congregation, we'll have written guidelines for leaders and congregants that guide them in what to do.

The Right Relations Team is about to launch a survey to "take the temperature" of how members of the congregation currently view communication and relations at First UU. This survey will first be administered at the Board level, and then distributed to all congregants. We hope you'll take the opportunity to share your thoughts with us.

We're adding additional members to our team this month to better represent all parts of the congregation. The team will be working with the ministers and other First UU leaders to carry out our work.

We've also been evaluating resources from the UUA and other sources that pertain to conflict transformation, leadership development, and communication. These resources will be the basis of trainings to be offered by the end of June 2024.

The Right Relations Team makes a "Promise from the Heart" to each other and each of you to do our work with kindness, intention, and with whatever wisdom we can muster. Remember that each interaction with another person, another congregant, another human being, matters—today, tomorrow, and tomorrow. May it be so.



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How It Works:

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2. Keep the items until the auction closes.
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