



First  
Unitarian Universalist  
Church of San Diego

# FirstWords

Our Monthly Magazine

Summer 2024; Vol 18 No. 6

## Valeria Aguilar, Our New Membership and Social Justice Coordinator

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

Valeria (Vahl-air-ree-ah) Aguilar, our new Membership and Social Justice Coordinator is a native of San Diego. She lived in Tijuana until she was 10 years old, then moved with her parents to the Eastlake area. She attended High Tech High Chula Vista in middle school and high school.

Valeria is now back in her hometown after completing her double bachelor's degree in Political Science and Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. While in the Bay Area, she gained experience in community organizing and leadership while further developing her interest in social justice, education, and collective action. She developed a program to mentor school students to take the classes that would help them get into college. She also worked with incarcerated people in Berkeley. She graduated from Berkeley in December of 2023.

She was raised Catholic, in the Mexican traditional way. She is not a UU but is learning what Unitarian Universalism is and finds the values of the denomination are compatible with her own, particularly the 7th principle about the interdependent web of all existence.

Valeria was looking for a job that was more hands-on than doing something theoretical or research oriented. She found our listing through Mana de San Diego. Established in 1986, the mission of Mana de San Diego is to transform communities by empowering Latinas to achieve upward mobility and a better quality of life. She liked the fact that the values of First UU are grounded in social justice.



In the beginning, she will be primarily gathering community input, to see what the congregation would like to focus on concerning social justice. She would also like to get to know everyone. From there, she will see what she can do to make the desires of the congregation happen when it comes to social justice.

She feels that First UU is a place where a person can come in as an outsider and become part of the congregation. She feels this translates into how First UU works with other parts of the larger community. In addition to her social justice duties, Valeria will also be

helping newcomers and others through the membership process at First UU.

Her hobbies, as Tony Bianca pointed out in her introduction during the service at First UU, are crocheting and arts and crafts. She also practices yoga.

She looks forward to getting to know everyone at First Church. Please feel free to reach out to her at [valeria@firstuusandiego.org](mailto:valeria@firstuusandiego.org).

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## Continuing Our Journey Together

by Rev. Justine Sullivan, *Lead Minister*



Dear Ones of First UU,

It's hard to believe we're approaching the half-way mark of our time together, as we conclude the second year of our four-year developmental ministry.

It's been a good year—full of beauty (the arrival of our new assistant minister, Kristen Kuriga, and other new staff—such a strong staff and ministry team!) and with moments of shared loss that have also been beautiful (saying goodbye to Carolyn Owen-Towle, Jim and Betty Grant, and many other beloveds). We gather in community to celebrate and to mourn.

We're making progress on the developmental goals that you and your board of trustees laid out for this time. We've re-engaged the stay/go decision with the exciting addition of a third possibility to share our campus with an organization that would buy some or all of our property and develop it in a way that aligns with our values. At our annual meeting on June 9th, the Our Sustainable Future team will update the congregation about one such opportunity and ask for your support in pursuing that option.

At the end of this church year, we'll say goodbye to our beloved music director Marshall Voit, who has been accepted into a Master's program in choral conducting in Arizona. Marshall has provided great leadership to our music program, and we'll miss his beautiful singing and playing in worship. Our own Rose Littler-Riedel will begin her Intern Ministry at Mt. Diablo UU congregation in Walnut Creek in August. We wish you well, Marshall and Rose!

We also say goodbye to our Minister Emeritus Rev. Tom Owen-Towle, who is moving to Santa Barbara to be closer to family. Tom and Carolyn's legacy lives on in the heart of this congregation. We're grateful for their many years of service, and we wish Tom well in his new home.

Over the summer both Rev. Kristen and I will take some time off—I'll be gone for July and Kristen will be gone for August. Our Intern Minister, Swamini Adityananda Saraswati, is working with members of the congregation to plan summer worship. Marshall has once again organized ensembles to provide music over the summer. It will be lovely to experience worship together with some new voices sharing insights and spiritual practices that will enrich us all.

I wish you all some time for renewal and recreation over the summer. I look forward to continuing our journey together.

*Rev. Justine*

## June Worship Schedule

### Hillcrest Worship Time:

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

### South Bay Worship Time:

Sundays, 10 am, Suite 104

### June's Theme:

#### "Renewal"

Throughout the month of June we are exploring the spiritual theme of renewal. We are renewed by so many things: nature, each other, memory, music, play, solitude, silence, and -- of course -- our faith. What kind of renewal are you yearning for? Join us as we explore potential sources of renewal together.

## Summer Fun

by Tony Bianca, *Director of Lifespan Faith Formation*



By the time you read this, All Church Camp will be over. But as I write, we're one week away from Camp and there are over 70 folks from First UU registered to go! One of the most exciting things about Camp is the space it creates for people of all ages to gather and get to know each other better.

People who attend often comment on the sense of community they feel and report they leave Camp with a renewed appreciation of what it means to be in a multigenerational congregation.

Maybe you were unable to go to Camp or perhaps you did go and would like more of those kinds of experiences of community. Well, fear not! We have several things planned throughout the summer that, I hope, will fit the bill.

**Saturday, June 22nd, Picnic and Games at Civita Park in Mission Valley ([Civita Park map](#)):** We'll gather at the park for a picnic and games. We'll meet just above the playground from 4 pm – 7 pm. Bring food for your family and, if you'd like, bring something to share. We'll provide light refreshments and outdoor games, but you can also bring a chair and simply sit and enjoy time together.

If you've not been to Civita Park, it's a lovely space built into the side of the valley with awesome landscaping, a scent garden, ping-pong tables, chess and checkers tables, an amazing 2-level playground, and lots of little nooks and crannies for gathering. Civita is built on the incline of the valley, but there are accessible ramps to all levels of the park.

**Sunday, July 7th, Worship Service, "Bringing it Down the Mountain - Camp on Campus"** Folks who have gone to Camp will collaborate to share some of their experiences with all of us in

this multigenerational Sunday Service. Afterward, we'll have some camp-like activities on the patio and in Bard Hall. It's my hope that this can be a fun morning to share memories from Camp and to give a taste of Camp to those who haven't been to Camp before.

**Saturday, July 20th, Picnic and Bonfire at the Bay** (exact location TBA - Check the Window for details): We'll meet at Mission Bay for our annual picnic and bonfire. We've hosted this event for the past several years and it's been a fun time for people to chat, play games, and share s'mores and other snacks. Bring a chair and some food to share!

**Saturday, August 24th, Picnic and Scavenger Hunt at Old Town San Diego State Historic Park ([Old Town San Diego State Historic Park](#)):** Gather at the Square in Old Town Park. We'll have a picnic and then team up to crack clues and find different locations throughout the Historic Old Town area. Folks are free to participate in the hunt, or just bring a blanket or chair and enjoy being together.

Because I grew up in a congregation that was also a large part of my family's social life, I'm a firm believer that having fun together is part of the spiritual work of community. In my opinion, when we get to know each other, we experience the sacred. I hope to see you at any or all of these summer events!



# Our Sustainable Future: An Update

by Rev. Justine Sullivan, *Lead Minister*

In 2018, UCSD offered First UU over \$36 million dollars to buy the entire campus. It's telling that the vast majority of you didn't say yes to that deal. That offer set in motion a period of deep discernment and unleashed a great deal of sorrow: Should we stay or go? Will we still be First UU if we don't have our flagship campus in Hillcrest?

First UU began looking at various options—other locations, working out the terms of a deal with the buyer, and considering the physical requirements of any new space. Then the pandemic shut it all down.

The Stay or Go decision didn't disappear, it went underground, with an impact on the life of this church. Questions came up like, "Why are we fixing that if we're just going to move?" "Why should I pledge if we're just going to leave?"

Grief combined with uncertainty is a potent mix. We decided to reconsider the question of Stay or Go again. A wise staff member then asked, "Might there be a way to share this space with the hospital or some other entity that would support our mission and values?" (Paraphrase mine, and the wise staff member was Tony Bianca!) We presented this third option of *Share* at a congregational meeting on January 28. There was a collective sigh of relief and a bubbling up of enthusiasm for this idea.

The question that remained was, "How can we stay here in a way that will be financially sustainable?" To be clear, the members and friends of First UU are all generous in their giving. The parking lot continues to exceed budget in the revenue it generates. Our endowment is robust and, also, continues to generate income.

However, giving is down slightly each year and that trend is likely to continue, with the highest income and highest giving being concentrated in the older members of the congregation. With the new hospital construction and parking garage, our parking lot income is at risk. We must think creatively about managing costs and increasing or stabilizing our revenue.

In March, I convened a steering team to look at three options:

For "Stay," Director of Operations Robie Evans hired a company to complete a thorough assessment of the entire Hillcrest campus and all its systems (HVAC, water and sewer, electrical and internet, roofs, etc)—systems that need regular maintenance or are expensive to replace. This assessment will provide a clearer understanding of the true cost of remaining on this campus. Otherwise, we run the risk of huge, unplanned expenses.

For "Go," team members contacted the commercial realtor we've worked with to find other locations for us. So far, nothing looks appropriate, and the offer to purchase from UCSD is now on hold. To go, we'd have to find someone to buy this property. This remains the least attractive and least possible of the three options.

For the third option, "Share," we've some exciting developments. Our first conversation with UCSD about sharing this property generated great initial interest. With this option, UCSD would buy the entire campus from us (at current market value) and then build space for worship and other needs for us (office space, other gathering spaces, etc).

Unfortunately, UCSD is putting new projects on hold. They recommended another potential partner—Family Health Centers of San Diego, a nonprofit agency that serves the uninsured and underinsured across San Diego County.

Here's the summary of the Family Health Centers conversation:

- They would buy the parking lot and build both parking and office space for healthcare services.
- They might buy one other building for elder services.
- If we want affordable housing built as part of this project, Family Health Centers would find another partner for that, so it is absolutely a possibility.

We've some real options for building a sustainable future, ensuring our financial health in a way that aligns with our mission and offering value to the community. We'll continue to communicate regularly, and ask the congregation to offer ideas, questions, concerns, and support. Let's keep on moving forward!

# Front Street Productions Community Event Series



## Barbershop Harmony Showcase featuring Los Bordershop Quartet and special guests

Concert: 7:30 pm Saturday, July 27<sup>th</sup>  
Free admission

Summer/  
Fall 2024



## 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Summer Arts Festival

Music and more!  
3 - 5:30 pm Saturday, August 17<sup>th</sup>  
Free admission



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Summer Tardeada

Traditional Mexican Dance Party  
2 - 5 pm Saturday, September 7<sup>th</sup>  
Free admission

Family-friendly  
concerts and  
events.



## Tasha Smith Godinez Album Release Party

Champion for contemporary harp music  
7:30 pm Friday, October 18<sup>th</sup>  
Free admission



## Juan Reynoso - Storyteller

Renowned Storyteller  
7:30 pm Saturday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Free admission



## First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego

298 W Arbor Street, San Diego, CA 92103  
(619) 298-9978

► Free parking in our lot



Funded by  
the Outreach  
and Growth Fund

**Registration and tickets at [FrontStreetProductions.org](http://FrontStreetProductions.org)**

# Love Unites, Stories Ignite – GA (General Assembly) Online

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*



**UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLY**  
VIRTUAL GA • JUNE 20 - 23, 2024

The 63rd General Assembly will take place virtually this year, from Thursday, June 20, through Sunday, June 23, 2024.

General Assembly is the annual gathering of Unitarian Universalists, where we conduct business of the Association, explore the theological underpinnings of our faith, and lean fully into our mission and principles. Please join GA online for this 4-day immersive experience where UU's from across the country and world participate in inspirational worship services and informative workshops, reconvene with friends and colleagues, and explore our virtual exhibit hall.

All registrants can attend Business Meetings but only delegates can vote on business items. First UU has 10 delegate slots—not all of them filled yet. For more information contact [John Schaibly](#) or submit an [application](#).

In a world filled with division and challenges, the theme for this year's General Assembly is a powerful reminder of the core principles that unite us as Unitarian Universalists. "Love Unites, Stories Ignite" celebrates the profound impact of love as a binding force that transcends boundaries and fosters connections within our faith community and beyond.

Our faith has always been rooted in the power of storytelling, and this year we'll explore how our stories can ignite change, inspire compassion, and help us build a more just and equitable world. Through storytelling, we share our experiences, our dreams, our struggles, and our triumphs. It's through these stories that we can find common ground, deepening our understanding of one another and the world around us.

Full online registration includes access to GA 2024 online in the Whova event app on your phone, laptop/tablet, and/or desktop, as well as on-demand programming, featured speakers, and major worships.

Full registration is \$400. Financial support is available.

## 2024 Registration Information

Video of some events from General Assembly (GA) 2024 will be live-streamed, June 20-23—no registration required. Live-streamed events will include the General Sessions and Sunday Morning Worship.

The Ware Lecture, Service of the Living Tradition, and Synergy Bridging Worship will not be available for public live-stream or on-demand viewing. General Assembly registration is required to live-stream these events or access the video on-demand.

GA will offer dozens of outstanding programming selections (workshops, panel discussions, worship services, and other presentations) over the course of five days. Programs will provide attendees with concrete and usable tools to further the work, and the balance needed to explore multiple identity-based and theological perspectives.

First UU's Rose Littler-Riedel, who is heading off to an internship in the Bay Area, will be offering a workshop on "Making Room in the Pews for Working-Class UUs." It can be found in the "On-Demand" section of the schedule in the WHOVA app. [Here is a link](#) to the preview video.

Like Unitarian Universalism, GA offers a wealth of theological diversity. A variety of worship choices are offered throughout GA. The Service of the Living Tradition is where we commemorate fellowshipped and credentialed religious leaders, those who have died (including our own Carolyn Owen-Towle), those who have completed active service, and welcome those who have received fellowship or credentialed status in the past year. Sunday Morning Worship at GA is a powerful, communal worship experience and is the largest annual gathering of UUs in Worship.

## **Financial Support Available**

The UUA (Unitarian Universalist Association) is committed to the goal of making GA accessible to as many attendees as possible. Go to UUA General Assembly [financial scholarships](#) to learn about scholarships to support delegates—particularly those from marginalized groups—and volunteer opportunities (work in exchange for registration).

# Choral Music This Summer

by Marshall Voit, *Music Director*



If you've always wanted to see what it's like to be in the choir, here's your chance this summer. You'll need to attend the listed rehearsals and then be available to perform at the concert/services indicated for each session. You may attend any or all of the sessions.

The schedule appears below. Contact [marshall@firstusandiego.org](mailto:marshall@firstusandiego.org) for more details. The YouTubes for each song are linked in the description.

## Summer Choir Session 1 June; "Yiddish Music from A to Z"

This session will ramp up to two performances:

- Thursday, June 27 at the Klezmer Summit concert, and
- Sunday, June 30 at the Hillcrest worship service.

The choir will prepare two songs: *Ale Brider (We Are All Siblings)*, and *Zol Shoy'n Kumen Di Ge (May Redemption Come)*.

Schedule as follows:

- Rehearsals: Mon. 6/10; Wed. 6/12; Mon. 6/17; Mon. 6/24, 7 pm — 8:15 pm
- Concert: Thurs. 6/27, 6:30 pm call, 7:30 pm concert
- Service: Sun. 6/30, 9 am call, 10 am service

## Summer Choir Session 2 - July (Music-TBD)

This session will run during the month of July, leading up to a performance at the Hillcrest service on Sunday, July 28, where members of the choir are invited to help lead the service. Los Bordershop Quartet will be here for a concert on Saturday, July 27, and will join us for the service on July 28.

- Rehearsals: Mondays, July 1, 8, 15, and 22 7 pm — 8:15 pm
- Service: Sunday, July 28th at the Hillcrest worship Service: 9 am call, 10 am service

## Summer Choir Session 3 August (Music - TBD)

Stay tuned for details for this session.



**Staff**

*Rev. Justine Sullivan, Lead Minister*  
*Rev. Kristen Kuriga, Assistant Minister*  
*Swamini Adityananda Saraswati, Intern Minister*  
*Rev. Lone Broussard, Affiliate Minister*  
*Rev. Bonnie Tarwater, Rev. Everett Howe, 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*  
*Marshall Voit, Music Director*  
*Valeria Aguilar, Membership and Social Justice Coordinator*  
*Rose Littler-Riedel, Communications Coordinator*  
*Lara Anderson, Youth and Young Adult Coordinator*  
*Kate Collier, Program Assistant*  
*Jazmine Ramanathan, Administrative Assistant*  
*Corina Macias, South Bay Ministry Assistant*  
*Pam Bates, Scheduler*  
*Andrea Spiero, JUUL Tones Ensemble Director*  
*Tomás Acosta, Collaborative Pianist*  
*Lexi Pulido, South Bay Music Coordinator*  
*Ray Evans, Maintenance*  
*Mark Epler, Event Coordinator*  
*Rev. Dr. Tom Owen-Towle, Minister Emeritus*

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**First Church Web Sites:**

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

**South Bay Campus:**

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

**To view sermon video casts, click on this YouTube button:**



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

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