



FirstWords

A publication of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego

Introducing the Intern Minister for 2010-2011

by Sue Magidson

As I sit here amidst boxes and To Do lists, wondering how it will all get done, I am cheered by the knowledge that these myriad transitional tasks are taking me to YOU! I'm overjoyed to introduce myself as your incoming intern for 2010-2011. First UU was my first choice internship site and I'm excited by what I've learned about you thus far.

How to introduce myself in 500 words? One recurrent theme in my life is the seeming contradictions. Again and again, I find myself building bridges between disparate communities. For example:

As an undergraduate, double-majoring in English and Computer Science (with an unofficial third major in Music), I bridged the sciences and humanities when I taught nervous humanities majors how to use computers. (This was back when computers required large rooms and elaborate cooling systems, when email and word processing were novelties!)

After graduating from college, I fell in love with teaching middle-school mathematics. Horrified to discover how many students struggled with math, I responded by developing better methods and materials. In doing so, I needed to build bridges among classroom teachers, educational researchers, and instructional designers- three groups that collaborate all too rarely.

Religiously, I bridge two religions I'm a lifelong Unitarian Universalist *and* a lifelong Jew. My two Jewish parents discovered Unitarian Universalism shortly before I was born and embraced it wholeheartedly, letting go of Judaism and becoming active lay leaders at the Unitarian Church in Westport, Connecticut. That congregation raised me and I'm grateful for the teachings they offered: open your mind and heart; search for truth and meaning; expect a lifetime of questioning and learning; take care of one another.

I'm a UU through and through *and* my Jewish identity runs deep. As an adult, I filled in the missing pieces gradually - attending my first Passover Seder in my early twenties, observing the High Holy Days beginning in my thirties, and, after living in Israel in my early forties, keeping Shabbat whenever I could. As a Jewish UU, I've led many UU Passover Seders, preached about Jewish holidays, taught Hebrew chants, joined UUs for Jewish Awareness, and generally shared my love for Judaism with fellow UUs. Last summer, I started referring to myself as 100% UU and 100% Jewish (a mathematical impossibility, but 100% true!). UUism and Judaism run deep within my bones - living both faiths is often a joy and sometimes a challenge, but seems to be the only way I can walk through this world.

Much in life brings me joy, including singing with others, hiking, swimming, painting, Farmers' Markets, beach-combing, and dark chocolate. My call to ministry includes the joys of preaching and worship-leading, teaching and learning, reading and writing, deep and compassionate listening, building intergenerational community, even committee meetings! This coming year, I look forward to hearing your stories, learning with and from you, and walking together as we endeavor to live lives of meaning, compassion, joy, and justice. I'm so glad to be joining you!



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Arvid's Arcana

BY Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

Life is Precious

The last few months have been a time when creating memorial services has been a large part of my work. It is a privilege to be able to help celebrate the lives of people I have come to love. It's a gift I can give them and their families. And to have so many deaths in such a short time is also difficult. And naturally enough, I have more than ever been considering the impermanence of all things and my own mortality.

Human life is so precious. Precious because it is uncertain, and it will certainly end, and that's why it's such a beautiful gift, and one we shouldn't waste. Not only is human life precious, but human life in the circumstances that most of us find ourselves in is precious, because many human beings spend every waking minute simply fighting to survive. Relatively speaking, we have so much time and opportunity to use our gifts, to let go of our grasping, to realize our spiritual potential, and the freedom to make those choices, and we need only decide to do that.

What is it that you need to do, in the face of death awareness, to make your life shine in the memory of others, and to die with a satisfied mind, as the old song says? It's probably going to be a different answer for each of you, but there's consensus in the great religions of the world that it has something to do with loving and serving and letting go of our greed, of our ignorance and our hatred: To awaken. To awaken to the present moment, when the infinite beauty of the universe is available to you, with all its joy and pain. So be it.

August Sermons

Celebration Times:

Hillcrest Campus:

Sunday, 9:30 and 11:30 a.m.

South Bay Campus: Sunday, 10:00 a.m.

The summer's **Transformational Theme** is **Joy and Ecstasy**

August 1—Hillcrest

Right Action

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (live)

The fourth sermon in a series on the Buddha's program for spiritual liberation, the Noble Eightfold Path. This is a summary of the Buddhist approach to morality.

August 1—South Bay

What If ... In 4-D?

- Rev. Kathleen Owens (live)

Our annual sci-fi sermon in honor of Comic-Con.

August 8—Hillcrest

Right Effort

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (live)

The fifth sermon in a series on the Buddha's program for spiritual liberation. What are the things we can do to nurture spiritual growth?

August 8—South Bay

Right Action

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (pre-recorded)

August 15—Hillcrest

Embracing Complexities

- Sue Magidson, 2010-11 Intern Minister (live)

August 15—South Bay

Right Effort

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (pre-recorded)

August 22—Hillcrest

Spiritual Ecstasy for UUs

- Rev. Kathleen Owens (live)

August 22—South Bay

Embracing Complexities

- Sue Magidson, 2010-11 Intern Minister (live)

August 29—Hillcrest

(Almost) Everything You've Wanted To Know About Meditation

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (live)

The final sermon in the series on the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path.

August 29—South Bay

Spiritual Ecstasy for UUs

- Rev. Kathleen Owens (live)

A New Look for Children's Religious Education

BY Liz Jones, Director of Religious Education and Family Ministry

Beginning in September, families will have some choices when it comes to their child's religious education classes as the result of a decision recently made by the Children's Religious Education Ministry team.

The program at 9:30 will look very much as I described in the June First word's article. We will have a nursery with paid staff for children under two. There will be a class for Two and Three year-olds, a class for Pre-K/Kindergarten children, a class for First and Second Graders, one for third and fourth graders, and one for fifth and sixth graders. At 11:30, there will be a distinctly different program. We will create a child-care program for children three and younger with paid staff. There will be one class for four year-olds through second graders, and another class for third through sixth graders.

The 11:30 program addresses many needs that have been expressed by both families and teachers. We have been asked by some parents to increase the opportunity for their children to get to know a broader age range of the children here in the church. This option will allow more of that. We've also been asked for more hand-on, active programming, and the curriculum chosen for our third through sixth graders does exactly that! Our teachers have also been asking us to find ways to create larger class sizes at this hour since during this last year, there were times when only one child came for a class. That's disheartening for both the teachers and the student. The broader

age grouping and the new choice of a more active curriculum should help increase class sizes.

Parents may choose to register their children for our more traditional program at 9:30 or this new option at 11:30. We will use many of our familiar curricula at 9:30 with the addition of two new curricula for the fifth and sixth grade class. We will use the new UUA Tapestry of Faith curricula

called "Toolbox of Faith" in the fall/winter portion of the year, and "Love Connects Us" in the winter/spring portion of the year. At 11:30 we have chosen to use two new curricula.

Our primary children

will use the curricula "Picture Book: UU" and our upper grades will use the curricula "Spirit of Adventure". Both are age appropriate Unitarian Universalist Identity curricula.

We encourage you stop by the Religious Education table on the lower patio Children's Ministry Team members will be happy to show you the curricula and answer your questions. We believe that the classes will be fun to teach as well as to attend.



Living Our Covenant of Good Relations

Part I: Reducing Triangulation

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles on good communication skills in congregations.

While people often suggest that venting is good for the soul, it is actually not very productive. Venting to someone about a third person is simply an avoidance technique that creates what is known in counseling theory as a relationship triangle, or triangulation. Triangulation is talking about feelings, opinions, or personal issues regarding some person or group with a third party instead of with the person or group actually concerned. Relationship triangles usually involve three people who each take one of three roles: victim, persecutor, and rescuer. Once in a triangle, people change places among its three points. The only way to stop the triangulation is for each person to communicate his or her feelings, concerns, or opinions directly to the other.

Of course, the best communication strategy is to avoid being recruited into a triangle in the first place. But so often, well-intentioned faith leaders and congregants listen to another person's concerns, feelings, or opinions, then realize they have inadvertently let themselves be co-opted into involvement, sometimes even taking sides. Once in a triangle, escape may take some courage and clarity, but is possible. The triangulated person can redirect the other person straight to the appropriate individual or committee --the one actually involved in the personal issues or the one that can address the concern or mend the relationship. A three-way conversation sometimes helps, but only if the third party facilitates without taking sides or having an agenda, without speaking for one of the other parties, and without adding to the emotional drama.



Adapted from [Healthy Disclosure: Solving Communication Quandaries in Congregations](#) copyright © 2007, the Alban Institute. All rights reserved. Used with permission. More articles available at www.alban.org.

COVENANT OF GOOD RELATIONS for FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF SAN DIEGO

Preamble:

We members, friends, staff, and ministers of First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego covenant 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 respect and honor ourselves and others when we:

- ✧ listen, speak, and act with integrity and compassion;
- ✧ communicate openly without anonymous criticism; and
- ✧ express gratitude and appreciation.

We value ourselves and others when we:

- ✧ invite and welcome into our church the diverse populations and cultures of the wider community;
- ✧ enjoy each other with playfulness and good humor; and
- ✧ act with awareness of ecological issues.

We learn when we:

- ✧ educate ourselves about church structure and governance, and the responsibilities of ministers, staff, and volunteers;
- ✧ appreciate our own limitations as well as those of others; and
- ✧ practice the established process of resolving differences.

We serve when we:

- ✧ contribute our financial resources, time, and skills according to our ability, whenever possible; model Unitarian Universalist beliefs and values; and
- ✧ strive to reflect more accurately the demographics of the wider community in our Church.

Covenant of Good Relations
Approved by the Congregation
on June 8, 2008

Campus Renovation Update, August 2010

BY Kath Hillery

The design/development phase of our campus renovation project is nearing a successful end. While our development permits are still being reviewed by the City, as of the end of July, it is likely that we are nearing approval, as only one item is still outstanding. The current issue under consideration is the preservation of

the artwork on campus, including the memorial wall, the fountain, and the stele, which have been determined by the City to have significant historical value. The City wants assurance that these items will be protected and preserved, and has requested a "treatment plan" that will outline the steps that will be taken during construction to safeguard these treasures. Taking special care of these pieces has been a consideration since the inception of this project. We have arranged to work with the original artists to remove and store the stele and other

free-standing pieces during construction and reinstall them when construction is complete. Our project consultants are currently preparing the treatment plan that will be submitted to the City in August. In addition, our Board of Trustees made a finding at its June meeting that exempts church property from designation as a local historical resource, thus assuring that we are not subject to more restrictive environmental requirements that could adversely affect our ability to pursue our mission as a church.

Once the City grants our development permit, our project manager will immediately apply for a building permit. During this process, the City's civil engineers will review our construction documents to make sure that the pro-

posed building will be structurally sound and in compliance with local, state and federal requirements. This process is expected to take about two months, and it is unlikely that major revisions will be required as a result of this process.

The contracting process will begin concurrently with the building permit process. The general contractor will use our construction documents to prepare bid packages that will be distributed to a variety of subcontractors. The subcontractors will review the package and submit bids for their portion of the work. They may also suggest more efficient ways to

construct the building that will save us money and/or give us a better structure. This process is referred to as value engineering, and it saved us several thousand dollars in the first phase of construction, the electrical upgrade. Our project manager will review the submitted

bids to assure that the contractor is charging us a fair price. Once all the bids have been submitted, the general contractor will put together a special document called a guaranteed maximum price contract. This contract locks in a maximum price for us, and has a savings-sharing component that rewards the contractor for saving money while reducing the final cost for us. This contract also guarantees that the contractor will be responsible for any cost overruns.

It is expected that there will be a groundbreaking ceremony in the fall. The members of the Campus Project Oversight Team are looking forward to this day, and invite you to join us in celebrating this momentous occasion.



Culture and Cultural Diversity: It Can Be a Stretch

BY Tony Brumfield

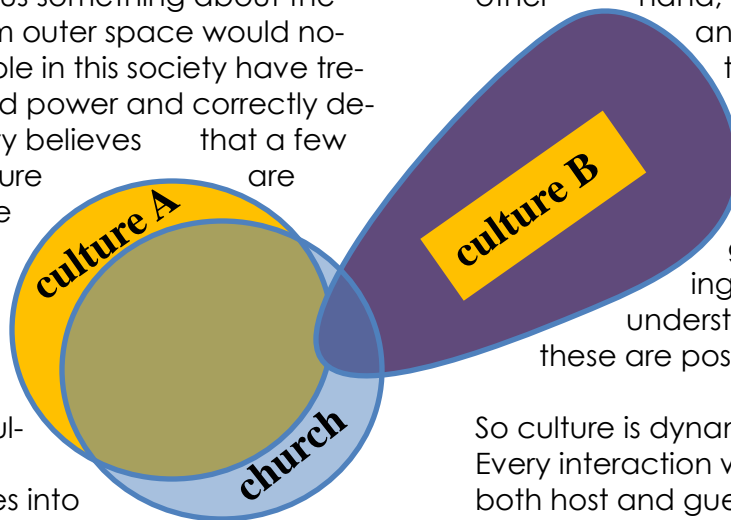
Culture is the learned way of life of a people. It is how they do life. It is those shared elements of life that allow people to live together, to work together, or do church together.

Anthropologists teach that there is tangible culture (the things we can see and touch) and intangible culture like social norms and language. All of the different parts of culture have to be somewhat compatible. One element of culture tells us something about the whole. An alien from outer space would notice that a few people in this society have tremendous wealth and power and correctly deduce that this society believes that a few members of this culture are much more valuable than the rest of the members in spite of what is said about equality.

First Church has a culture. When a person from culture A comes into this church they feel affirmed. The culture of the church matches what they are accustomed to. When a person from culture B comes into First Church, it is a stretch. The way that things are done feels foreign. They may be put off by the things that are said or by the way some members eat and dress. And that may be okay. But culture goes deeper than that.

When person B from culture B visits First Church and spends some time sharing her culture with the members, and learning about Unitarian Universalism, the members are changed and

she is changed. The members go home thinking about themselves and the church differently and so does she. If the members like her and her culture, and she likes First Church and stays, she may be given a position of power in the church. As a result, the culture of the church may move in the direction of culture B. The members may also gain some clarity on how the culture of First Church is distinct from other churches, and she would gain a greater understanding of her own culture. On the other hand, the members of First Church and she may discover that they have completely different ways of thinking about the world and are not compatible at all. Or perhaps their short time together would be spent talking past each other totally misunderstanding the other. All of these are possibilities.



So culture is dynamic. It never stays the same. Every interaction with the "other" changes both host and guest. If you enjoy thinking about cultural diversity and would enjoy working with others to make Unitarian Universalism welcoming to people from other ways of life, then set aside Saturday, October 2. On that day, our church is hosting Nehrwr (pronounced Nay-wah) Abdul-Wahid with One Ummah Consulting from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Members from other UU churches in our cluster will be in attendance as well as people who are not Unitarian Universalists. It promises to be an interesting weekend. If you plan on attending please leave a message with Tony Brumfield at tbrumfie@cox.net or call him at 619-339-0354.



Marcia Biller

Because we both sing in the First Church Chalice choir, it is part of my pre-nuptial agreement with Marcia. It's funny the things you discuss when you are taking that great leap into matrimonial bliss. But I'll get back to that.

Marcia was born of Jewish parents, both from Eastern Europe. Her mother arrived at Ellis Island in 1928 at age 14. Marcia's father was born in what was before World War I the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He was educated in Vienna and possibly had connections to a group that assisted persecuted Jews to leave Austria. He went originally to Uruguay and his family got into the leather trade. He met Marcia's mother (Millie) in the late forties in New York City. They married and in 1950, Marcia was born. Leo died when Marcia was not yet ten. Millie now had Marcia and two younger sisters to raise and returned to work as a legal secretary.

Marcia went to college at 17, and got her bachelor's degree at State University of New York in Buffalo. She had her rebellious period in the late 60's, taking Women's Studies and showing an interest in worker's movements, and is rather blasé about the fact that she was at Woodstock, THE Woodstock. She remembers the difficulty in getting there and back, and most of all she remembers the mud, the soaking wet sleeping bag and the numbers of totally freaked-out beings.



An Interview with Marcia Biller

BY Robert McMahon

After college, Marcia settled in San Diego. She was looking for a choir to sing in when her friend Susan Schereschewsky told her to try First Church. That was 1983 and Marcia has been singing in the choir ever since. A choir high had to be when they performed Carl Orff's Carmina Burana. She still sings in the First Church Choir, but also with Point Loma Nazarene College and the PACEM singers at St. Paul's. She has also been very active in the lay pastoral care group and was on the associate minister search team that brought us the Rev. Kathleen Owens.

Marcia's fondest memory of church was the naming ceremony for our son Matthew, now 19. She so enjoys the children's programs, but continues to be amazed at the talent in our congregation and in the talents that are attracted to perform at First Church.

If she has a philosophy on life, it is to help people and to be present for them. She befriended a woman from choir, Ella Agnew, and visited Ella in her nursing home. She and Peggy Holl were with Ella in her last hours of life. It was not an easy death to witness, but Marcia was convinced that her presence and love were a great comfort to Ella. Marcia will soon be trained as a listener for hospice volunteer work. She feels that this is a small way she can give back.

to help people
and
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Oh yes, the pre-nuptial. Well, when we married (22 years ago) we agreed that if we ever split up, Marcia would get the choir. Although we do not plan to exercise that agreement, Marcia does have a new love, but I'm not jealous. It's our soon-to-be one-year-old grand-

son Callum. He brings us love, hope and a renewed joie de vivre.

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 Suzette Southfox, Director of Membership and Development
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