



# FirstWords

A publication of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego

## THE U(U) ORIGINS OF TODAY'S HANDBELL CHOIR

BY ROY ATTRIDGE



Cast-Metal bells have been around for millennia, with the oldest known examples found in China dating to circa 2000 BCE. Forward to 16th century England, and we find groups (or 'teams') of ringers in drafty church towers playing changes – complex mathematical sequences of ringing the



bells with none repeating. A series of at least 5000 sequences (changes) is called a peal, and takes approximately 3 hours to complete with 8 bells. Tradition holds that if a mistake is made in ringing a peal, the ringers must start over from the beginning. The question becomes, how to practice without freezing to death or driving the local village insane?

Handbells, as we know them today, are descended from small instruments tuned to the same notes as those in the towers which were used by the ringers to practice – usually in the comfort of a back corner of the local pub. Pub-goers would often buy the ringers drinks to get them to stop (the author believes that this may be worth revisiting). Over time, teams branched out from the exclusivity of change ringing by adding the voices of handbells to church services and public gatherings through the ringing of accompaniments, fanfares and actual musical lines and tunes.

While it is believed that handbells were introduced to the United States in the first half of the 19th century, most notably by P.T. Barnum and his "Swiss Ringers" (who weren't Swiss – they were from Liverpool), they remained a little-known side show novelty. The handbell choir as we know it today can trace its origin to Margaret Shurcliff – a Unitarian woman from Boston.

In the late 1800's, the bells of the Old North Church (of Paul Revere fame, who in addition to leaving lanterns sitting around, was a tower ringer there) had fallen into a state of disuse and disrepair. It was at this time that young Margaret travelled to England with her father to

learn the art of tower ringing, hoping to bring this knowledge back to Boston to raise interest in restoring the bells and the tower ringing tradition. While in England, Margaret came to be greatly respected by her peers, and in 1902 at the age of 23, was the



The Beacon Hill Ringers © Boston Public Library

first American woman to participate in a full tower peal. Shortly thereafter, she rang two peals on handbells in one day, and was presented with a set of 8 Whitechapel handbells by that foundry's general manager. Following her return to Boston, additions were made to this set, and in 1923, the Beacon Hill Ringers began the tradition of caroling at Christmas on the steps of the Unitarian Church's headquarters at 25 Beacon Street.

Margaret was an enthusiastic advocate for handbells, and groups of ringers began to form all over the Northeast following her group's example. In 1937, supporters and ringers met in her home, and the New England Guild of Handbell Ringers (NEGHR) was organized, with Margaret elected the new organization's first president (another organization born in the Shurcliff living room was the ACLU – but that's another article).

By 1954, the popularity of handbell choirs had spread across the country, and the organization was expanded to the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers (AGEHR) shortly before the first American Handbell Festival. In 2010, AGEHR changed its name to Handbell Musicians of America, and today boasts approximately 5000 member organizations, including First Church of San Diego.

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## December

BY REV. KATHLEEN OWENS, LEAD MINISTER

Have you noticed the deepening dark coming on earlier and earlier...and the real chill in the air at night? December is here and it is one of my favorite months of the year. The early arrival of nightfall stirs in me a longing to be quiet, to ponder and wonder and watch. I find myself watching for the twinkling lights, white and multi-colored blinking in rhythm as reminders that we are not left alone in the dark, as reminders that light is on its way. Somehow, the tiny lights blinking against the black velvet dark brings a warmth only found in this month.

For many of us, of course, this month also brings a busy, frantic pace to our days and nights...trying to fit in more events, buying gifts we may or may not afford, along with the social pressures of trying to keep up and make people happy. In this whirlwind of a season, how important it is to find a way to take a deeper breath and pause...to ask oneself what is really needed, what would truly be a gift and how might one celebrate the season without exhaustion but participate in ways that help foster deeper connection and a sense of joy.

This community offers several opportunities to connect with others, to sing together, to find reasonably priced gifts, to hear beautiful music of the season, to serve others, to participate in Solstice ritual, to see and hear again the ancient story of birth and joy and stand in wonder as candle light illumines our Meeting House and our hearts. You can find a list of all these opportunities on our website or pick up a flyer at the Welcome Table or in the office. It is my prayer that as you participate in these events, you will experience a greater sense of peace and wonder and be carried into the New Year with joy.

Faithfully yours,

### Save the date – Rev. Kathleen Owens Installation

What a joy it is to announce my Installation as your Lead Minister. The service of Installation and Celebration will be on Sunday, January 11, 2015 at 4:00 p.m. We will have special music, inspiring words, and the act of Installation followed by a reception filled with tasty treats and drink. This Service of Installation is a way for the whole community to participate in a ritual marking the formal beginning of new ministerial leadership in our church. Mark your calendars and plan to attend.

## December Sermon Messages

### Celebration Times:

Hillcrest Campus: Sunday, 9:30a and 11:30a  
(ASL Interpretation)

South Bay Campus: Sunday, 9:30a  
(Intergenerational, Bi-lingual [Spanish, English])

The **December Transformational Theme** is **Light**

### Sunday, December 7:

Hillcrest Services—

**"On the Importance of Light,"**

Rev Kathleen Owens, Lead Minister.

South Bay Service—

**"How the Light Gets In,"**

Rev Jennifer Channin, Assistant Minister.

### Sunday, December 14:

Hillcrest Winter Service of Music—

**"Love and Joy Come to You,"**

Rev Jennifer Channin, Assistant Minister.

South Bay Service—

**"Our Lady of Guadalupe,"**

Rev Kathleen Owens, Lead Minister.

### Sunday, December 21:

Hillcrest Services—

**"Light Sings,"**

Adam Dyer, Intern.

South Bay Service—

**"Winter Solstice,"**

Kristen Kuriga, South Bay Coordinator;

Dr Melissa James,

Director of Children and Family Ministry.

### Wednesday, December 24, Christmas Eve:

Hillcrest —

5:30p, **Vespers Service**

8:00p, **Candlelight Service**

### Sunday, December 28:

Hillcrest Intergenerational Services—

**"This Little Light,"**

Rev Kathleen Owens, Lead Minister.

South Bay Service—

**"Boxing Day,"**

Adam Dyer, Intern.



## THE RETURN OF LIGHT AND HOPE

BY DR. MELISSA JAMES, DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY MINISTRY

The way the Jewish calendar and Christian liturgical year line up this year, means that my home will once again have both an Advent wreath and a Menorah lit simultaneously. Soft candlelight will grow to fill the darkening evening, starting with one candle on Nov. 30th, culminating with 13 candles burning by Dec. 24th.

In our community, while one family anticipates Yule, another looks forward to Kwanzaa, while yet another is setting up a Christmas tree and adorning it with sparkling lights. Many of us will join in the celebration of Solstice at one or both campuses. I have always loved this time of year, because as the various religious and spiritual paths from the Northern Hemisphere mark the shortening of the day and lengthening of the darkness, they do it by bringing their attention back to the light.

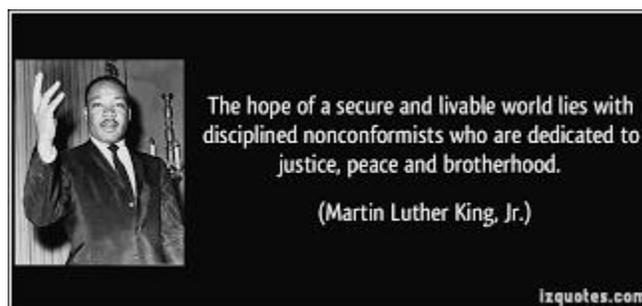
It is my favorite time of year because we are invited into a time of unbridled hope—hope that the sun will once again bring back light; hope that we may turn back to the source of life. Hope is profound and hope is prophetic. The celebrations invite us to renew our hope, to work on bringing healing to the places that are the most broken in our world. Active hope fuels our work for justice. Hope is only tempered with anticipation.

Kids get anticipation. This is the other reason I love this season, as I work with families. They may not always like it, but the youngest among us know what it means to have to wait. They learn what it means to glimpse something they want in the distant future, which may be unreachable right now. They learn that if they wait patiently and work towards that goal, it becomes reachable.

How do we, as a multigenerational community, support one another in hoping and waiting and working for a just world and a just community? We need to stop and listen to the children, who can teach us what it means to hope and anticipate, even when our world is at its most challenging. Children have real challenges, real pain, and real grief and yet so many of them in our community hold onto the real hope that there is still good in the world. They hold onto the hope that they can love and are lovable. We have a lot to learn from our children.

We also have something to offer the children through the values we teach them about our community. Rather than focusing on counting down until we receive that newest toy or present or gadget, we can focus on hope as a spiritual community. We can focus on relationships. We can focus on telling the stories that call us back to real hope. This is a great gift that we, as a community, have to offer each other.

We are a multigenerational community who live and work in active hope for a world of peace and justice. We offer our children opportunities to be in real relationships and we support those who are nurturing the children among us, as they raise children who want more than stuff. Our children can then offer us opportunities to be in real relationships and support us as we remember to focus our attention on light and hope. I invite us to lean into hope together this season.



# PERSONAL INFRASTRUCTURE: BUILDING THE POST FERGUSON BELOVED COMMUNITY

BY ADAM DYER, INTERN MINISTER



In the world of urban planning, "infrastructure" refers to sidewalks, utilities, roads, and sometimes schools and even healthcare. These are the tangible systems that are in place that allow people to live in a modern Western society. But what about *Personal Infrastructure*? What are the "roads" and "utilities" that must be in place for people to be able to thrive and relate to one another and share values and a way of life together? What are the set of systems people use to support how and with whom they live in community? More importantly, for Unitarian Universalists considering multiculturalism, what are the systems in place that result in the continued racial segregation within the denomination?

Unitarian Universalist churches are predominantly white. Despite some valiant efforts through education, a handful of prominent people of color and a denominational presence in several political discourses that center around people of color, on Sunday morning, Unitarian Universalist churches are almost entirely white. People come to church because of people they know or people they want to know. If no one in the church knows any people of color, people of color will not spontaneously appear. The Personal Infrastructure of most Unitarian Universalists, (that is, the people they know) is predominantly white between family and intimate friends. Therefore, whiteness as a Personal Infrastructure keeps Unitarian Universalist churches white.

The danger here would be slipping into value judgments and by default simply labeling the situation outlined above as "racist." However, Personal Infrastructure is not about motivation or intention; it is about the *system*. The system (congregants bringing people they know into the church) is not racist, but the system can be used for racially biased outcomes. The subjective choice to be surrounded socially by one demographic is based entirely on social location and *this is a choice not a system*. So the solution exists in using the system differently or creating a new one. For instance, Unitarian Universalists should be

challenged by a mission to explore who they are in relationship with and how that translates into congregational diversity. Creating a new system could mean intentionally planting churches in communities of color with local residents after doing outreach to community leaders. No matter what, change begins with the Personal Infrastructure of existing Unitarian Universalists.

By looking at real Personal Infrastructure, we can take an objective view of highly problematic systems and come up with realistic and well thought out solutions. Dwelling on white guilt and slapping down oppressive behaviors will not fix Unitarian Universalism's race problem. Exploring Personal Infrastructure has the potential to dive deeper into actual problem solving because it is objective, non-accusatory and non-judgmental. Congregations and congregants can assess their level of actual engagement of congregants with people of color outside of the church, and create a plan and for awareness looking for times when they may have missed opportunities to develop relationships with people of color. Then and only then should they ask "why?" and explore their motivations. Is this a cultural choice that has been passed on or learned? Is this motivated by fear or discomfort or some other bias? Looking at Personal Infrastructure paves the way toward asking these tougher questions.

Infrastructure supports the way we live in our society. Knowing one's *Personal Infrastructure* supports the way we choose to live both in our society and within ourselves. By exploring Personal Infrastructure as it relates to race, it could potentially change the dialogue within the denomination Unitarian Universalism and give us the denomination an authentic voice in public discourse about multiculturalism.

What community will you build with your Personal Infrastructure?

Read more from Adam's blog [here](#).

## GETTING CONNECTED IN A LARGE CHURCH

BY CHRISTINA IMHOOF AND MARV PULLIAM

A large church, such as First Church, is attractive in many ways. It offers a beautiful campus with ample meeting space, has sufficient children to support a viable RE program, has adequate professional staff to meet the needs of the congregation, and has an experienced team of ministers.

At the same time, its size can be intimidating to the newcomer. Current church members may even have difficulty to "know" the church. The challenge is for the church to offer easy ways to connect and get to know others within the church community. Small groups have proven to be one of the best ways to "get connected" quickly.

Some of the most popular types of small groups at First UU are:

- Wisdom Circles
- Neighborhood Groups
- Affinity Groups

These small groups are quite different, and serve to illustrate the variety of possible choices for getting connected.



### Wisdom Circles

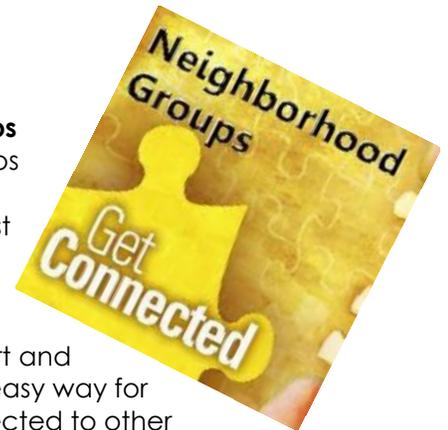
Wisdom Circles are the latest form of covenant group, as described in Robert Hill's Book, "The

Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry", a UUA sponsored publication. Wisdom Circles are intentional, facilitator led, open small groups that meet monthly to study topics based upon the worship theme chosen by the First UU church ministers. They help build community and provide opportunity for deeper relationships - intimacy - and opportunity for deeper spiritual exploration.

Being a member of a Wisdom Circle provides the opportunity to connect on a spiritual level with others in the group. Typically, new Wisdom Circles are formed annually, but a newcomer can join a group during the year by contacting Chris Christenson at [chris@firstuusandiego.org](mailto:chris@firstuusandiego.org). Visit our Wisdom Circle [webpage](#).

### Neighborhood Groups

Neighborhood Groups are gatherings of people attending First Church, who live in common areas and meet in social gatherings for support and fellowship. This is an easy way for families to get connected to other families. Contact Chris Christenson, [chris@firstuusandiego.org](mailto:chris@firstuusandiego.org) to find the group nearest you.



### Affinity Groups

Another way is to find a place at First Church is to find affinity groups that



promote activities to match your interests. We help you find those activities by listing them on our website and publishing their events in the weekly newsletter, the Window. In addition to these groups, there are Adult Religious Education courses, shared interest groups, e.g., books, crafts, and movie discussions, that provide yet another opportunity to connect. Check the newsletter or contact Chris Christenson, [chris@firstuusandiego.org](mailto:chris@firstuusandiego.org). Interested in San Diego history, want to check out the benefits of vegetarian cooking? Start your own small group!

So what are you waiting for? Get off the couch, and check out what is already underway! Joining small groups is the most effective way to share with others, and it allows you to explore the many ways of finding your "niche" in the congregation.

# SAN DIEGO UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST NETWORK (SUUN)

UPDATES BY NANCY FISK



The San Diego Unitarian Universalist Network (SUUN) represents all the congregations in the San Diego County area, or what is known as a cluster. Representatives from each congregations meet on a regular basis to talk about what they can do to collaborate on events of importance to the cluster.

SUUN was busy last year. They sponsored a Day at Seminary at First Church. A Taste of UU, held at UU Fellowship of San Dieguito (UUFSD), featured food and musicians from every congregation in the cluster, and was a kickoff to the new congregational year. There was a Peter Mayer concert also at UUFSD in October.

On the current SUUN calendar is Rev. Kathleen Owens' installation at First Church on January 11th, an Emma's Revolution concert at UUFSD on January 24th and a leadership conference at First Church on January 31, 2015. This conference will feature workshops on social media and web communication, mental health and congregations, and planned giving. Everyone is encouraged to attend. The conference is runs from 8AM to 3PM and is free. Attendees will need to provide their own lunch.

According to Rev. David Miller, the ministerial representative for SUUN, the purpose of SUUN is "to facilitate us coming together as a group of congregations." In the future, this will also include collaborating on cluster-wide social events, social justice events, best practices and sharing resources.

Rev. Miller adds that, "There is a growing sense across Unitarian Universalism that there is a benefit in finding places where congregations in a particular area can share resources personnel, purchasing power, insurance, facilities, etc ." The current organization of SUUN is based on a model from the Denver Cluster, who recently hired a Minister for Cluster Social Justice Coordination.

The website at [www.uusandiego.org](http://www.uusandiego.org) has been redesigned with the help of Ame Stanko, a member of First Church. There are events listed there for the different congregations that have cluster wide interest. In the future, SUUN would like to facilitate scheduling that ensures congregations in the cluster are not competing with major events on the same nights.

The representatives of the congregations besides Rev. David Miller are: Susan Riegal Harding, member at large; Barbrey Bryant, First Church, South Bay campus; Julie McKane, First Church; Treasurer Vickie Newman, UUFSD; Dave Cochran, Palomar UU Church; Secretary Jennifer White, Summit UU Church; and Donna Davin Summit UU Church. In the future, it is hoped that congregational boards will appoint 2 people from each congregation to SUUN.

See the website at [www.uusandiego.org](http://www.uusandiego.org) for more information.



# CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

BY KATH HILLERY

As far back as the days of the Pony Express, Unitarians and Universalists used novel ways to reach out to liberal religious people who wanted contact with others who shared their values. The Unitarian "Post Office Mission" sent tracts from Boston to ranchers and farmers who lived out west. The Post Office Mission and similar programs sought to provide a spiritual home and connection for isolated religious liberals as well as programs and services that promote the growth of Unitarian Universalism. From this effort came a church without walls that was later labeled [the Church of the Larger Fellowship](#) (CLF).



Times change, and so do methods of communication. Now the CLF is an online source of religious exploration and support. Through its sister website, [Quest for Meaning](#), the Unitarian Universalist Association supports a congregation of 3,500 people who worship online and by mail. Weekly worship is offered on Mondays from 10:30 to 11:00 a.m. Pacific time and on Sundays from 5:00 to 5:30 p.m. Pacific time. In addition to online worship, there is a monthly publication called the [Quest](#), and an archive of videos and podcasts (audio files) available for free.



The VUU is an online talk show of the CLF that discusses current events from a UU perspective with UU insiders and spiritual leaders. Hosted by Meg Riley and Joanna Crawford, the VUU is both entertaining and newsworthy. The VUU can be seen live on Thursdays at 8:00 a.m. Pacific time. Archives of past shows are available at the Church of the Larger Fellowship's YouTube channel ([CLF YouTube Channel](#)). In addition to the talk show, the YouTube channel offers video meditations, prayers, homilies, sermons and reflections as sources of spiritual support.

The Church of the Larger Fellowship provides support to those who are isolated by choice or by circumstance. There is a Prison ministry and a Military ministry that supports those who are in need of spiritual sustenance but aren't free to attend a church service. In addition to the online services, there is a letter writing ministry that pairs UUs with CLF prisoner-members who want to correspond by mail. CLF membership is free to prisoners, thanks to donations from generous people who support this specialized ministry. Open letters from the prisoners are published on the Quest for Meaning site ([Prisoner-Members Write](#)).

The Church of the Larger Fellowship also serves small and emerging congregations that aren't ready to stand fully on their own. "[Worship Express](#)" is a subscription service offered by CLF that provides online resources for worship and religious education, including complete worship services on a wide variety of topics. In addition, CLF offers small groups and classes, [family activities](#) and a group specifically for Young Adults called the [Church of the Younger Fellowship](#) which supports a Facebook discussion page solely for young adults.

The Church of the Larger Fellowship and Quest for Meaning websites both contain ample resources for people who seek to expand their spiritual life. These outreach resources have evolved with time to serve Unitarians, Universalists, and those who are still seeking a religious home.

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