



FirstWords

Our Monthly Publication



SOLSTICE CELEBRATION

BY SUZETTE SOUTHFOX

On a cold night in December, 1995, congregants of First Church gathered over the course of three

nights to celebrate Winter Solstice with members of the Earth Centered Spirituality Circle. There was drumming, dancing, story-telling, singing and hot spiced cider. This remarkable production of liturgical theatre and public ritual was created in the round to about 100 people each night. The original script was conceived and created by Grace Lewis-McLaren, who served as First Church's Administrative assistant for more than a dozen years.

2015 marks twenty years of celebrating the magic of Winter Solstice with this beloved community. Since the first ritual in 1995, thousands of people have been deeply moved by this special UU Pagan worship experience. In 2005, the ritual moved from a three night affair to one large, one-night ritual seating over 400 inside the Meeting House sanctuary of First Church. For many, the community gathering, magical characters, roaring bon-fire, music and shared hot wassail on the patio before (starting at 5:15p), and after the ritual are just as important as the ritual itself. This year's Solstice celebration will be on Saturday, Dec. 19, 2015 at 6:30. Tickets are on sale on the Sunday patio and [online](#).

This year Winter Solstice will see the addition of the Page, Father and Sage along with the Maiden, Mother and Crone. The Shimmy Sisters will bring the voice of belly dance. Monette Marino will invoke the voice of the drum, Lynn Mendoza Kahn will bring the voice of the Goddess and Melissa Morgan will provide the Celtic harp for the gathering of the tribes.

Winter Solstice is not a show, but a sacred worship event which has elements of liturgical theater such as singing, dancing, storytelling, poetry, drumming, reflection, and prayer. It is appropriate for all ages and spiritual paths. Children are welcome and childcare is provided for the very young ones. Festive Solstice attire is encouraged, from flowing capes and garland crowns to faery wings and traditional holiday garb.

Why celebrate solstice? Throughout history, many cultures have recognized and celebrated this sacred and transformative time of year. Our ancestors grew worried as the longest night of the year approached. Increased darkness meant less food, difficult shelter and certain death. In order to cope with the danger of the growing darkness, dances were devised, masks were worn, stories were told, and special foods were prepared. Shamans, crones and sages were called upon to lead the community in bringing back the light to the world.

Pagan Winter Solstice motifs were adapted by early Christians to create Christmas, in which the birth of Christ resonates with other Sun (Son) Gods born at this time. Winter Solstice had been associated with the birth of a "Divine King" since the Sun is considered to represent the Male Divinity in many Pagan Traditions; this time is celebrated as the "return of the Sun God" where He is reborn of the Goddess.

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PEACE, CALM, HOPE

BY REV KATHLEEN OWENS, LEAD MINISTER

December is a month filled with traditions, holidays, special foods, music, lights, expectations and maybe, too many events and activities. Hope is our worship theme for the month and with good reason. Many of the stories we tell, the symbols we see around us express different hopes during this holiday season.

We hope for peace, for calm, for a deeper sense of connection and community; we hope our work will have meaning and that our children's lives will flourish; we hope that one day justice, love and mercy will reign. And with all we hope for, we are invited into a community that celebrates hope in many ways – through worship services with extra music, rituals, Solstice and more.

We also want to acknowledge that holidays are not always times of celebration for some...and I'm thankful to Rev. Ian W. Riddell, our Minister of Music and Worship Arts for offering a Blue Holiday service on Dec. 1st. This worship service will be a time of honoring all the feelings and emotions that may come up for folks during this holiday season. I hope this service will be a rich and meaningful experience.

Along with this new worship service, we also have a new outreach program led by Melissa James, Director of Children and Family Ministry specifically for families who have children and/or youth who identify as transgender. Melissa is collecting resources and information along with program ideas that will help support our families and more information about this program will be coming in the early spring. One of my hopes for this new program is that this congregation will become known in the larger San Diego community as a faith tradition that values the inherent worth and dignity of all people.

This month there are many opportunities to join together in song, cheer and celebration. Please see the December Holiday Events poster for a full listing. I hope to see you at a few or several of these events, knowing your presence and participation are the true gifts of this season. May you experience peace and joy this holiday season.

Faithfully yours,
Kathleen

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 Hope

Sunday, December 6:

Hillcrest Services—

"How Much Longer Must We Wait,"

Rev Jennifer Channin, Assistant Minister

South Bay Service—

"Welcoming Desire,"

Megan Dowdell, Intern Minister

Sunday, December 13:

Hillcrest Annual Music Services—

"Magnificat!"

Rev Ian W Riddell, Minister of Music and
Worship Arts; First Church Music Ensembles

South Bay Service—

"Hope Rising: Our Lady of Guadalupe,"

Rev Kathleen Owens, Lead Minister

Sunday, December 20:

Hillcrest Services—

"Once Upon a Time,"

Rev Kathleen Owens, Lead Minister

South Bay Multigenerational Service—

"Befriending the Dark,

Befriending the Light,"

Rev Jennifer Channin, Assistant Minister;
Kristin Kuriga, South Bay Coordinator

Thursday, December 24:

Hillcrest Christmas Eve Services

Family Nativity 5:30p

Candlelight 8:00p

Sunday, December 27:

Hillcrest Services—

"Hope Rising: Our Lady of Guadalupe,"

Rev Kathleen Owens, Lead Minister

South Bay Service—

"Rise Up, O Flame!"

Rev Ian W Riddell, Minister of Music and
Worship Arts



TRADITIONS AND HOPE

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

This is one of my favorite times of year. Not the commercialization, not the busy-ness, not the consumerism. . .none of that brings joy to my life. What I love about this time of year is what I find in my Advent traditions and what I see our community find in the myriad of other traditions, some spiritual or religious and some not, that ask us to take a breath, take stock of where we and our world are at right now, and lean into the active hope of a just and peaceful future together. As our various traditions invite the light of candles into our homes and our church, we shine light on the ways our principles call us forth to be what we profess to be.

As I was preparing for this season of reflection and hope, the Parent Advisory Team and I hosted a Family Ministry Forum to have a conversation about our hopes and dreams for Children and Family Ministry at First Church. We had a great group representing families with children aged 2 to 12. Together, we went through a process of dreaming together, setting priorities, and looking at what we already do and offer at First Church and what else we want to help us meet our goals.

Here are some of the major take-aways from our time:

A central value framing how we approach our community is truly respecting and honoring the dignity and worth of our children and treating them as full participants in our community.



... we shine light on the
ways our principles
call us forth to be what
we profess to be ...



Priorities:

Some of our top priorities for the next year include:

- Forming networks among and within families and children to build community and relationships
- Focusing on leadership development of children as well as parents as an expression of our principles
- Increasing multi-generational involvement across the congregation particularly in planning and leading social justice opportunities and worship services
- Creating learning opportunities for children and families particularly around varieties of religious and spiritual expressions, music, etc.

Next Steps:

In addition to examining the programs and offerings we currently have in Children and Family Ministry, we talked together about next steps.

One of the exciting new pieces we will be adding to Children and Family Ministry this winter to help us live out our first priority are the Family Ambassadors who will serve as intentional community builders on Sunday to help connect families, old and new, with each other. If you are interested in serving as an Ambassador (as an individual or as a family unit) contact Dr. Melissa (melissa@firstuusandiego.org).



MEET OUR NEW DEVELOPMENT MANAGER: PAM BATES

BY ROBIE EVANS, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS

I want to thank Jan Garbosky, Doug Diamond and Stephanie Webber who joined me in the search for a new staff member to be the Development Manager. This is a part-time position that will work closely with Kathleen, Jan Garbosky, Development Program Manager, Robie Evans, Director of Operations and the Generosity Ministry team. We created a job description and posted it in several places, including the First Church website. We received many resumes and, after a careful screening process, interviewed four people for the position (do I need to say 2 males and 2 females?). After much discussion the committee unanimously agreed to offer the position to church member Pam Bates. Pam comes to the staff with an extensive background in business management, planned giving experience and wonderful people-skills. We are delighted to welcome her to the staff.

Pam began attending First Church before the birth of her first child in 2002, and she became a member in 2008. She has been involved in

Children's RE, the Birth-6th Grade Parent Group, Wisdom Circles, and the Earth-Centered Spirituality Circle. Pam regularly attends the early service with her teenage daughter, who was part of the Coming of Age ceremony this summer, and her seven-year-old twins.

Pam's prior business experience includes Operations and Project Management, Marketing and Distribution. She brings with her many years of working with individuals, and coordinating both small and large groups of people, to support the success of the organizations she has been a part of. Pam started her professional career helping to identify funding channels for research and development at a public university, and she has worked with individuals who wished to incorporate planned giving in their financial goals.

Pam has also volunteered in the community as a youth sports coach, and to promote the use of sustainable energy resources in California. She enjoys gardening, cooking, spending time with her children, and enjoying the beauty of nature.

◀ Solstice Celebration, continued from page one

Other cultures that celebrate the solstice are the Kalash people of Pakistan who celebrate the great spirit of generosity, which wanders the country, collecting their prayers. The Hindi participate in Diwali, a five-day Festival of Lights. The people of Swaziland recognize solstice by having their king withdraw for several days, before emerging to celebrate the sun's return. The Hopi Kachinas emerge from their underground home in order for light to triumph over darkness. In Japan, the Sun Goddess Amaterasu is coaxed out of her cave.

To create the magick of Winter Solstice here at First UU, members of the Earth Centered Spirituality Circle engage in six months of planning, and put in over 500 hours of labor through the hearts and hands of at least 100 volunteers.

The mission of our Winter Solstice Celebration is to provide our community with a meaningful experience of ritual and celebration that includes blessings, music, shared libation, dancing, storytelling, poetry and readings. Through this experience we hope all ages will learn that whether you call it Yule, Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, or Solstice...they are all celebrations of sacred light, joy, and renewal.





At Christmastime, Unitarian Universalists often focus on the birth of Jesus: the arrival

of new life, the possibility for hope. We love the sheep and shepherds in our pageants, sing joyful carols, and find the candle-lit quiet winter night comforting. Perhaps because we're uncomfortable with virgin births and angels bringing messages, we don't spend a lot of time thinking about Mary, the woman who gave birth to the hopeful baby.

Isabella Leonarda's Magnificat, which the Chalice Choir will be presenting at the heart of our Service of Music on December 13, is the setting of Mary's words of joy and praise at learning that she would be giving birth to Jesus. The Chalice choir will then perform Leonarda's Ave Regina Caelorum. UUBellation also rings in our musical celebration of the day.

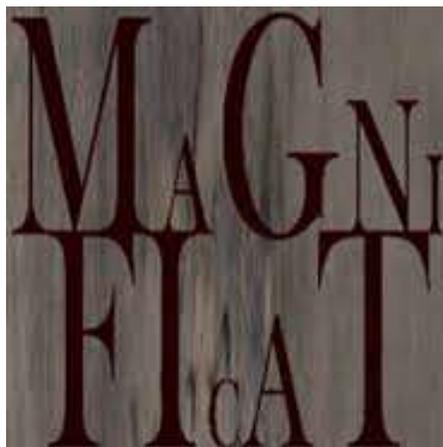
Despite having composed more than 200 compositions in her life, Isabella Leonarda – who lived from 1620 to 1704 – is not a household name like the male composers who followed her. Women of her time were greatly restricted in what they could be and do in polite society. Interestingly, convents became places where brilliant and

ISABELLA LEONARDA'S *MAGNIFICAT*

BY REV. IAN. W. RIDDELL, MINISTER OF MUSIC AND WORSHIP ARTS

creative women could often find opportunities to learn, teach, compose, and gain broader influence. Here women could express their devotion and their passions in their writing, art, and music. Often, some of the best musicians in town were the women of the convent. This was certainly true for Leonarda, who entered Collegio di Sant'Orsola, an Ursuline convent, at the age of 16 and remained there until her death. During her time there, she composed dozens of compositions. Despite pressures from male church officials to keep things appropriately demure, Leonarda's compositions show all of the musical liveliness and passion of the era. She was one of the first female composers to publish instrumental music.

And have you noticed that not only have we chosen to focus on a female composer on the day we are exploring Mary's choices, but almost every week in our Sunday service, our organist and pianist, Justin Murphy-Mancini, has shared with us a work by a female composer, from the famous (like Amy Beach) to the less well-known (like Louise Haenel de Cronenthal and Nkeiru Okoye). Justin has made finding and sharing this music part of our congregational goal to broaden and enrich the diversity of voices in our worshiping community.





Winter Benefit Concert

Featuring
Voices in Unity
and
Emerging Voices

Under the direction of
Lynn Mendoza-Khan

Accompanied by
Justin Murphy-Mancini

7 p.m. Saturday, December 5, 2015
First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego
4190 Front Street



Advance tickets— \$10; Tickets at the door— \$15
Additional donations welcome!
Students 18 and under are free.
All proceeds go towards Children's & Youth Choir Programs



MEET JENNER DAELYN, MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

My name is Jennifer (Jenner) Daelyn, and I am the Membership Coordinator here at First Church. I am originally

from Tucson, Arizona, where I attended the University of Arizona and graduated with a degree in English and Creative Writing and also had the opportunity to study abroad in Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Following graduation, I moved to Philadelphia to be with the woman who is now my wife, Kiona Daelyn, as she studied Dance Education at University of the Arts. In Philadelphia, I coordinated a food pantry for people living with HIV and AIDS at an LGBT health center in the middle of downtown. I discovered a real calling to help people in need – especially people in marginalized populations facing systemic oppression and poverty.

After two winters on the East Coast, Kiona and I decided to move to San Diego for the beach, the wonderful weather, and the progressive politics of California. We were married in Arizona on the Summer Solstice in 2012, and had our union recognized legally in California in 2013.

While here in San Diego, I have worked as a fundraiser for an environmental organization, and as the coordinator of a food pantry that served people who are homeless, low-income families and seniors, and active-duty military families. I am passionate about food justice issues and I believe that access to safe, healthy food is the foundation upon which everything else in life is built.

I first came to First Church through the Earth Centered Spirituality Circle (ECSC) soon after coming to San Diego. I was raised in a conservative, non-denominational Christian church, but realized as a young teen that the spiritual practice that spoke to me the most was Earth-centered and pagan. After meeting the members of the ECSC and attending services, the UU community at this church felt like what I had been searching for.

Kiona and I would love to have children eventually, but for the moment, we have 2 cats and a bunny. Other things to know about me: I have many passions, some of which are environmental issues, social justice, anti-racism and oppression and veganism.

I enjoy Unitarian Universalism because it allows a sense of community for many different faiths and has a reasonable approach to issues. I believe the main practice of faith is to help others.

I am glad to be a part of this team and to help others to find a sense of belonging in this church family. I believe that fellowship and acceptance can be profoundly healing, and I am thrilled to be able to be a part in that dynamic and healing process for new members of this church.

Watch for your January 2016 issue of First Words in your mailbox on January 6, 2016.



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 Matt Mazzeo, Laura Todd, Sue Marberry; *Members*

ONLINE E-mail & Web Addresses

FirstWords Editor & Submissions, Nancy Fisk:
nfisk1@juno.com

To be added to the E-mail List:

firstwords@firstuusandiego.org

Scheduling of Church Property Requests:

schedule@firstuusandiego.org

Order of Service submissions: oos@firstuusandiego.org

The Window submissions (Church bulletin):

[window@firstuusandiego.org](mailto>window@firstuusandiego.org)

Care Network: carenetwork@firstuusandiego.org

First Church Web Sites:

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

South Bay Campus:

<http://www.firstuusandiego.org/uus-of-the-south-bay>

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First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego

4190 Front Street (GPS use 298 West Arbor Drive)
 San Diego, CA 92103-2098

Phone: 619-298-9978

Fax: 619-298-9997

E-mail: mail@firstuusandiego.org

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to FirstWords,
 4190 Front Street, San Diego, CA, 92103.