



FirstWords

A publication of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego

Be a General Assembly Delegate

By Jeanette Fox

Do grass-roots movements attract you? Do our social justice issues draw you? Want to be involved in them beyond our congregation? Then consider serving as a First UU Delegate to the UUA General Assembly.

Many of us are drawn to UU because we like the idea that each congregation is its own democracy, but may not be aware that each congregation has a choice of whether or not to be a member of the greater UU Association or know what it does for the movement as a whole. One way to learn more about this in detail is to attend as a delegate. It is an unforgettable experience, one of "doing business" in a spiritual way.

The General Assembly of the Association meets yearly to address how to best serve its member congregations and to make public statements on issues we all care about. The next meeting will take place in Charlotte, North Carolina. Approximately 4,000 UU's attend. Many of them are there for the various workshops and classes, worship and music programs, and networking with other UUs of similar interests. But some of them are there to make decisions regarding the business of the Association and its stands on various social issues—these are the delegates from the member congregations.

The number of delegates from each congregation depends on its membership numbers. In 2009, the year I was able to attend, First UU sent 17 delegates, some of them for their first experience in this role. There are a number of "plenary" (voting) sessions to attend, and understanding what is happening can be a bit overwhelming for a first-timer, but there are always experienced delegates to ask for advice or clarification. Being a new delegate is like taking a "crash course" in UU governance! It's a serious responsibility to attempt to represent the various members of your own congregation to the best of your ability, and in 2009 we elected a new

President as well, something that happens only every four years.

In the next few years, major issues will be brought to the Assembly for decisions. Some of them include having the General Assembly meeting less often, finding the means of funding delegates' expenses in order to open up the experience to more of our members who might be finding it difficult financially to consider this form of service, and a rewrite of our Principles and Sources.

Hotel rooms near the meeting place are offered at discount rates beginning in March and they book up fast. Those of us who are still in the workforce likely need to apply in advance for the necessary vacation time. As a delegate, your registration fee is paid if you submit a report on your experience on your return. There's airfare and meals to consider, but rooming with another delegate helps on the expenses (and is fun besides). Some of our delegates save a little bit every month to be able to perform this service for our congregation—they consider it that important!

If you are interested in being one of First UU's delegates, watch the Window after the first of the year for information on applying. There will be ample opportunities to ask any questions you may have and to talk to members who have done this before—once or several times.



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Free Church Unitarian

BY Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

I want to tell you about an important experience-- worshipping with the Free Church Unitarian in Mexico City on Saturday evening.

This congregation is made up entirely of native Mexicans and the worship is in Spanish. They meet on Saturday evenings at the Quaker meeting house. The energy behind this congregation is that of Francisco Luganes Gaitan. The group, eight of us all together, gathered around a table and lit a chalice and Candles of Joys and Concerns. The liturgical elements were made up of translations of what we use in US UU worship and some carefully chosen Mexican sources. As good as the translations were, and as elementary as my Spanish is, I noticed that the Mexican elements had a lot more feelings and heart. They inspired me. There were Calls To Worship, Responsive Readings, songs accompanied by music on a laptop, including Spirit Of Life in Spanish, and a sermon by Francisco about what Unitarianism means to Mexicans.

We all took turns reading the elements of the service. I understood maybe 60-70%. The gist of the sermon, if I did comprehend it, is that Mexicans have a very different history and culture. British and United States Unitarianism developed as a reaction to Calvinism in the midst of a Calvinist culture. There are very few Calvinists in Mexico and Mexican Unitarianism finds itself interacting with and reacting to a very Catholic culture. And yet Francisco feels the universal and essential message of Unitarianism can have great appeal to Mexicans and it is their job to articulate it.

I loved especially the two readings by Rosario Castellanos, poet, playwright, and, I understand, Mexico's first feminist. They are the poems Awareness and Meditation At A Threshold. I wanted to quote the ending to the first poem, but could not find a good English translation on the internet.

There are about 20 regular attendees, but all don't attend at once. In addition, Juan Reyes, a philosophy PhD student, is the Adult RE Director, who creates courses that attract others to the church. Also, Francisco offers an adapted version of the UUA Adult Sexuality course, Our Whole Lives, in various prisons in the Mexico City area. The link to the web site, if you read Spanish, is www.unitarian.info.

I am so grateful to the First Church congregation for the opportunity to take this sabbatical time here in Mexico. It has enriched and expanded my world and, I believe, will help me minister more effectively in an increasingly multi-cultural San Diego.

January Sermons

Celebration Times:

Hillcrest Campus:

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

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

January's **Transformational Theme** is **Authority**

January 2—Hillcrest

Sabbatical Reflections:

Ten Things I Learned About Mexico

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (live)

January 2—South Bay

Frogs With Feathers

- Rev Jim Grant (live)

January 9—Hillcrest

More Power Than You Think

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (live)

January 9—South Bay

Sabbatical Reflections:

Ten Things I Learned About Mexico

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

January 16—Hillcrest

"Was It Something I Said?" -

Journey Toward Wholeness Service

January 16—South Bay

More Power Than You Think

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

January 23—Hillcrest

The Virtue of Justice

- Rev. Kathleen Owens (live)

January 23—South Bay

"Was It Something I Said?" -

Journey Toward Wholeness Service

January 30—Hillcrest

"By Whose Authority"

- Sue Magidson (live)

January 30—South Bay

The Virtue of Justice

- Rev. Kathleen Owens (pre-recorded)

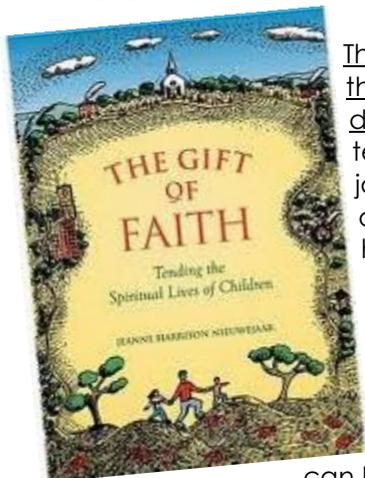


Starting Out With Good Intentions

BY Liz Jones, Director of Religious Education and Family Ministry

As I thought about a message for the New Year, and resolutions, I thought I might make a suggestion to our parents and grandparents for a New Year's resolution. One of the best ways you can help raise your children as part of this Unitarian Universalist faith, and influence the lives of your grandchildren is to educate yourself about Unitarian Universalism and reflect on how we parent and grandparent in ways that reflect what we believe.

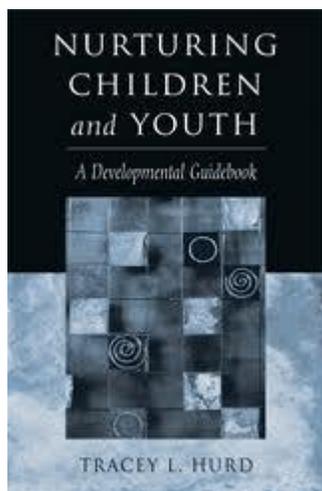
There are a few books available from the Unitarian Universalist Association and Skinner House Books that can start you on the path to parenting as a Unitarian Universalist:



The Gift of Faith: Tending the Spiritual Lives of Children is written by UU minister, Rev. Jeanne Nieuwejaar. Using stories from her own life, she reflects upon how our children engage the sacred and are influenced by our culture. She talks about the lives of our children and parents today and the role the religious community

can have in supporting our parenting and helping raise our children. The chapters lead themselves to reflecting on our own lives both as children and as parents.

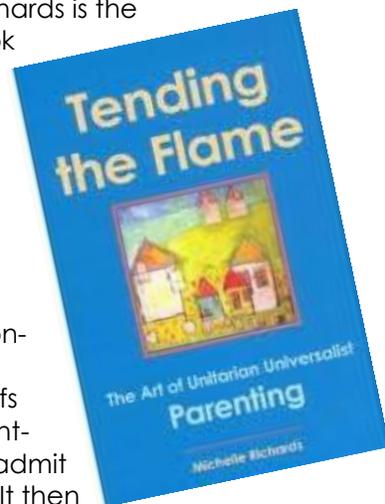
Nurturing Children and Youth: A Developmental Guidebook by Tracey L. Hurd is designed to provide information and guidance about the stages of development and growth of children from birth through young adulthood. This book is published by the Unitarian Universalist Association and is designed as one of the toolkit books that supplement the new Tapestry of Faith Curriculum. It is a wonderful



guide for teachers, parents and others who care about the development of the children in their lives. As with most "Ages and Stages" books, this one talks about the physical and cognitive development of children and youth. It also includes information about social development, moral and faith development and is one of the few general guides that also includes information on racial and ethnic identity development. Each chapter ends with a synopsis of the characteristics of that age, and the ways we, as adults, can offer support.

Tending the Flame: The Art of Unitarian Universalist Parenting by Michelle Richards is the newest Skinner House Book

focused on the needs of UU Parents. Where Tracy Hurd's book focuses on the children, this book is focused on the parents. It begins with the parents themselves—figuring out what you believe, putting your beliefs into words, continuing your own spiritual growth, putting your beliefs into practice in your parenting, and learning how to admit when we make mistakes. It then moves on to looking at our family lives, how our UU Principles can be emphasized in our parenting, and finally on how to deal with some of the difficult questions and situations that arise in family life and parenting.



These and other books on parenting, UU history and liberal theology can be found in either our bookroom on Sunday mornings or at the UUA online Bookstore at <http://www.uuabookstore.org>. Resolving to educate yourself about Unitarian Universalism and being a UU Parent could be a wonderful way to start the New Year!

Happy New Year!
Liz

Living Our Covenant of Good Relations, Part III

Rejecting Anonymous Feedback

Editor's note: We have previously addressed the issues of triangulation and pass-through communication in the [August](#) and [October](#) issues of *First Words*.

Why would someone give feedback anonymously? Several reasons come to mind. Anonymity allows people to avoid accountability for the content. The individual with the complaint or accusation may also fear reprisals. Sometimes the individual simply doesn't know who to talk to about a concern. At other times, the individual is trying to get his or her way in a conflicted situation, but stays underground to maintain the appearance of being in a harmonious relationship with other congregants.



Personnel committees and other groups that oversee pastoral ministry must be clear in their policies and practices that they will neither receive nor take seriously anonymous complaints, letters, phone messages, e-mails, or pass-through communication. Slanderous comments in particular should not be disseminated by the recipient, not even to the clergyperson or any others on a committee, unless the content contains serious threats or requires a legal response. Congregations can waste a lot of energy on slanderous static that interferes with their listening to and addressing real issues. If e-mails are sent from unknown sources, they can be stopped by a trusted leader sending a letter to the congregation asking everyone to block the anonymous sender of the information and to ignore the content.

Anonymous communication is damaging to everyone in the congregation because feelings are often expressed but cannot be resolved. Wounds are created but cannot be healed. Criticism is offered without the chance to explore the possibility of healing. To stop anonymous feedback, clergy and lay leaders need to agree that it is counterproduc-

tive. You can't apologize to anonymous. Anonymous will remain angry or sad until he or she comes forward with the truth. Anonymous others cannot and should not be considered when making leadership decisions or resolving conflicts.

A congregation can greatly reduce negative criticism and unresolved hard feelings with these simple and clear boundaries: no triangulation, no pass-through information, and no anonymous communication. When recruited into a communication triangle or to pass information on to another person, leaders need the mantra, "Please tell the person (or committee) directly yourself." When asked to respond to anonymously-obtained information, leaders need to simply

refuse to consider it substantive until the anonymous person is willing to more clearly own his or her concern. Congregational communication can sometimes hide secrets, agendas, and conflict. While clearer boundaries and transparency in communication may cause negative aspects of congregational life to come into the light, they also reveal the strength, commitment, and love that bind the congregation together ultimately giving more courage to faith leaders to address any negative dynamics that hinder their faith journey as a community.

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.



FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF SAN DIEGO
Board of Trustees

WHO TO CONTACT WITH SUGGESTIONS OR CONCERNS
REVISED - May 25, 2010

Members, friends, staff, and ministers of First Church have covenanted to treat ourselves and one another with respect. Communicating openly without anonymous criticism and practicing the established process of resolving differences are part of our Covenant of Good Relations. Our church community will remain healthy when we are grounded in direct, honest, and caring communication in an atmosphere of openness, trust, and respect.

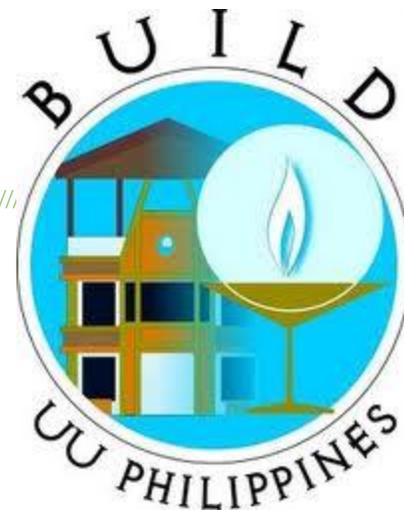
The first step in bringing forward suggestions or concerns is direct, one-on-one, communication. If this does not suffice, the chart below may be followed.

<u>Suggestion About/Concern With:</u>	<u>Initial Contact:</u>
▪ A Church Member or Friend	The Good Relations Committee (Contact church office for current members 619-298-9978)
▪ A Church Program, Church Committee, or Affiliated Group or Their Policies	The appropriate Paid Staff Support Person or Ministry Team Contact Person(s)
▪ Administrative/Facilities Staff or Policies (Facilities, Parking Lot, Maintenance, etc.)	The Director of Operations
▪ The Board or Board Policies	The Board or any Board member
▪ Lead Minister	The Board or any Board member
▪ Associate Minister, Intern Minister, Music Director, &/or South Bay Ministry Team Coordinator	The Lead Minister
▪ Director of Operations & Director of RE	The Lead Minister or Associate Minister
▪ Community Life Director, Social Justice Ministry Team Coordinator, &/or Young Adult/Campus Ministry Coordinator	The Associate Minister
▪ Music Program Staff (Choir Director &/or Children's/Youth Choir Director)	The Music Director
▪ Religious Education Staff (RE Education Assistant/Adult Ed Coordinator &/or Youth Programs Coordinator)	The Director of Religious Education & Family Ministry

Mailbag from the Philippines

BY Len Pelletieri

Last Holiday Season (2009), instead of sending donations to one of the other non-profits that provide Third World people with livestock to help them out of poverty, or sending relatives "stuff" they don't need, a couple of us sent a few hundred dollars to the UU Church of the Philippines. The ministers of the 29 churches there receive no salaries (you read that right; no salaries) so we gave them some livestock, and our gifts are still growing. The following is an excerpt from a letter from Rev. Rebecca Quimada Sienes, President of the UUCP.



My dear Len,

Last week of July, the UUMA (Ministers Assn) Execom adopted the idea of "pass the gift"—the heifer model—(and) decided to use your funds to buy a female piglet for (some) of the ministers. The minister will take good care of the animal until it gives birth, then will pass on two female piglets to two member households of his congregation. If the congregation has two ministers, the second minister will be the first recipient of the first pass on. The mother pig and the remaining piglets will become the permanent source of livelihood of the original recipient.

There were four ministers who were the first recipients of the gift.

- 1) Rev. Ludem Esquida, minister of Caican UU Church. The piglet is about 2 months old in his hand.
- 2) Rev. Rafael Vibar, Vice President of the UUCP, and he belongs to the Nagbinlod UU Church where the mango farm is located. The piglet has been in his hands for the last three months now.



Rev. Elinio Belimac, Sr.

- 3) Rev. Elinio Belimac Sr, the minister of the Samoyao UU Church. The piglet has been in his hands for the last two months now.

- 4) Rev. Tirso Ponsica. This was taken when Peter (Morales, Pres. of UUA) came to the area to visit the sea wall. Unfortunately, the piglet died. The policy states that if the piglet dies, the recipient of the gift will have to buy a replacement so that the chain is kept.



Rev. Tirso Ponsica

On the other hand, the UUMA Execom decided on the piglet because almost all of the ministers will receive the gift. Large animals such as carabao or cattle are very expensive and it will take years to pass on the offspring. The Execom also decided not to go with goats because the highest number of offspring the animal could produce would be two (2), not very productive.

Thanks a lot,

Rebecca

Interview with Susan Riegel Harding

BY Robert McMahon

Susan grew up in Marblehead, Mass., near Salem. She was adopted at age 4 ½ along with her sister and lived on the Atlantic seaboard.

At 15, she was sent to boarding school, and then attended Sweet Briar College where she met her first husband. She finished her BS at the University of Maryland, where he was getting his PhD in astronomy.

Her husband got a professorship at UCLA and they moved to Los Angeles in 1966 with their daughter Tatiana Riegel. Tati has become a very successful film editor with credits for "Pulp Fiction," "There Will Be Blood" and many others.

In L.A., Susan taught elementary school for 12 years, until she and her second husband moved to San Diego. Here, she worked for the Northrop Corporation, writing and managing training contracts. After eight years in the defense industry, she changed careers. She became a financial advisor and stayed with that for the next 20 years.

Susan has a reputation as a rebel – Rebel Riegel – they call her. She couldn't fix lives teaching, she couldn't abide the military ethos at Northrop and she struggles not to be cynical about the financial services industry. In her fourth career – that of volunteer at First Church, she feels that her constant flow of ideas ("Why don't we try this?" "Why don't we do that?"), must drive our ministers nuts.



Tati and Susan

She came to First Church looking for a choir, and was singing with us for 4 or 5 years. Originally she felt that if she were in a choir she would be able to stop her smoking habit. Well, after quitting over 300 times, she has broken the addiction and has been smoke free for seven months – bravo.

As a member at our church, Susan has (in addition to the choir) served as a Sunday school teacher, has served on Stewardship and Generosity committees, co-chaired several Rummage Sales, chaired the Membership and Planned Giving committees, co-chaired the Pledge Drive, but gets the most fun out of hosting game nights for Dining for Dollars.

be thoughtful of others, and go for it

Susan believes in the golden rule – "Do unto others," but has her own basic rule of, "First walk in other's shoes."

As a result she is often heard saying, "Tell me more." I got the impression that she is loathe to judge others, and though she does not believe in sin, she feels that we must make the most of our lives.

She is also a strong advocate for a green life, solar, all succulent yard, compost and drying clothes on a line. She doesn't want to get bogged down asking the "why" or looking for "the" answer to life. "No one knows, or ever will," she says, "Just be thoughtful of others and go for it."

She has no regrets, nor is she ashamed of anything she has done. She feels blessed that she can share her home and her time with others – she does wish she could have learned some things sooner. Ah, now she's preaching to the choir.

Staff

Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube, Lead Minister
 Rev. Kathleen Owens, Associate Minister
 Rev. Jim Grant, Affiliate Minister
 Sue Magidson, Intern Minister
 Martha "Mar" Cárdenas, South Bay Ministry Leader
 Karen Walter, Director of Operations
 Liz Jones, Director of Religious Education and Family Ministry
 Käthe Larick, Youth Program Coordinator
 Chris Christenson, Communications / DB / AE Coordinator
 Kristen Kuriga, Social Justice Ministry Team Coordinator
 Kenneth F. Herman, Director of Music
 Suzette Southfox, Director of Membership and Development
 Alice King, Young Adult and Campus Ministry Coordinator
 Rev. Dr. Carolyn and Rev. Dr. Tom Owen-Towle, Ministers Emeriti
 Patty Eshleman, Director, Unitarian Cooperative Preschool

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to FirstWords,
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ONLINE: Important E-mail Addresses

FirstWords Submissions: nfisk1@juno.com

To be added to the E-mail List:

firstwords@firstuusandiego.org

Facilities (request for maintenance):

facilities@firstuusandiego.org

General First Church E-mail: mail@firstuusandiego.org

Scheduling of Church Property Requests:

schedule@firstuusandiego.org

Order of Service submissions: os@firstuusandiego.org

The Window submissions (Church bulletin):

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

First Church Web Sites:

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

South Bay Campus:

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

Webmaster: website@firstuusandiego.org

Care Network: carenetwork@firstuusandiego.org



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