



FirstWords

A publication of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego

Women's Empowerment International

By Rhea Kuhlman



Amina Essa, the breadwinner in her family, serves up sambusas, eggplant, and lentils at the City Heights Farmers Market.

Amina Essa has always known how to make sambusas, but what she didn't know was how to support her family. When they fled Somalia in 1993, she and her husband and three small children looked forward to starting a

new life in San Diego. But within minutes of arriving at Lindbergh Field, her husband suffered a massive stroke, and Amina became the sole breadwinner for her family. With limited English and no professional skills, her options were few. But Amina did know how to cook, and that's where Women's Empowerment International (WE) came in.

Partnering with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), WE set up the WE STAR Center (Women's Empowerment Support, Training and Assistance to Refugees), which helps San Diego's refugee women start businesses that help support their families, and contribute to the local economy. WE STAR helped Amina buy equipment and set up a successful catering business. You can taste her delicious spinach and potato sambusas and eggplant dishes every Saturday at the City Heights Farmers' Market. They quickly became a favorite for vegetarians and vegans, and helped Amina Essa feed her family. Now her son has started a family of his own, and her two daughters are in college. Thanks to WE STAR, this story had a happy ending.

WE STAR has helped hundreds of women like Amina set up businesses in San Diego – refugees from conflicts in Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Burma,



Iraq, and many other countries. The businesses may be small – childcare, crafts, clothing imports, seamstress, cleaning service – but the impacts are large, bringing the women status in their families, and building the future for the next generation.

In addition to its San Diego program, San Diego based WE offers business microloans to impoverished women in Honduras, Ghana, and Sonora, Mexico, in conjunction with indigenous organizations. WE is proud to partner with Grameen de la Frontera in Mexico, the micro-credit organization founded by church member Ed Law and his business partner Marshall Saunders, which has given myriad women the tools they need to work their way out of poverty.

During May, First UU's weekly collection will be used in support of WE. Please join us at our work party on Saturday, May 28, to help tend the New Roots Garden where many WE STAR women grow their wares, or on our Saturday, June 11 Women's Federation tour of WE STAR's businesses, which includes a delicious Somali lunch (\$15). For more about WE, go to www.womenempowerment.org, or visit WE on Facebook. The dictionary defines a refugee as "one who flees from invasion, persecution, or political danger". WE defines a refugee as a potential businesswoman.

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Liberal Christianity

BY Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

Excerpts from a forthcoming book on Unitarian Universalist theologies

Unitarian Universalist Christianity is the oldest of the main theologies of Unitarian Universalism. The historical roots of both Unitarianism and Universalism are firmly within Protestant Christianity. ... This explains why most of our congregations are still called churches, why our clergy are called ministers, and why our gatherings are still worship services. ...

Unitarianism has its roots in Eastern Europe in the 1500s. Faustus Socinus in Poland and Francis David in Transylvania asserted that, "God is one." This is the rejection of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which asserts that God is in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The Unitarian assertion was that God is a unity and not a trinity. This meant that Jesus was not God, but a human being. ...

... The early Universalists asserted that God is too good to condemn any of his children to eternal punishment... ...The psychological argument was that God is a loving parent and no parent could be so evil as to torture his offspring for eternity. ... Instead of hell, the Universalist assertion is that God does not every give up on anybody. All will be saved. This doctrine is known as Universal Salvation and Liberal Christians today still hold to it...

...because Jesus was one of us, a human being, we can strive to live by his example. Jesus taught us to stand with the poor and speak up for those who have no voice. His life teaches us to accept, respect and forgive all human beings regardless of group, class, ethnicity or social position. ...

...Some UU Christians might be called Liberation Christians. For them, Jesus was one who worked for the spiritually, psychologically, physically, socially and economically oppressed. We need to follow his teaching and his example to help heal the brokenness of the world. ... Jesus was remarkably egalitarian for his time. He taught women and had women disciples, and that was one of the reasons he earned the enmity of the religious establishment of his time. For Liberation Christians, the central event of the Hebrew Bible is the Exodus, where a people who were enslaved cast off their bondage and sought their own destiny and identity. For Liberation Christians, the central event of the New Testament is the resurrection, not seen as a literal resuscitation of a corpse, but instead is the symbol of how the power of love and justice always overcomes violence and oppression. Liberation Christianity is a world wide, ecumenical movement. Some of its great exemplars are Martin Luther King Jr., Desmond Tutu and Archbishop Oscar Romero.

(continued ...)

May Sermons

Celebration Times:

Hillcrest Campus:

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

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

May's **Transformational Theme** is **Compassion**

Sunday, May 1—Hillcrest Campus

"Arvid's Excellent Adventure (Wherein, With His Beloved Companions, Arvid Straube Traverses Great Oceans To Discover the UU Faith In The Philippines.)"

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (live)

Sunday, May 1—South Bay Campus

"The Virtue of Transcendence and the Necessity of Freedom"

- Rev. Kathleen Owens (live)

Sunday, May 8—Hillcrest Campus

"The Virtue of Hope—How Mothers and Faith Work Together"

- Rev. Kathleen Owens (live)

Sunday, May 8—South Bay Campus

"Arvid's Excellent Adventure"

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (live)

Sunday, May 15—Hillcrest Campus

Annual Service of Music—"The Promise of a Free Faith"

Sunday, May 15—South Bay Campus

"The Virtue of Hope—How Mothers and Faith Work Together"

- Rev. Kathleen Owens (live)

Sunday, May 22—Hillcrest Campus

Youth Service: Let's Eat! Fighting Hunger in San Diego

Sunday, May 22—South Bay Campus

Immortality

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (live)

Sunday, May 29—Hillcrest Campus

"Compassion: Examining Our Own World"

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (live)

Sunday, May 29—South Bay Campus

Sue's Farewell Sermon

- Sue Magidson, Intern Minister (live)

...Was Jesus in any sense divine? Yes, I believe he was, but I believe that his divinity was a human divinity, one which is not beyond the reach of any of us. His resurrection was not a physical event but an event that is always happening; that happens every time a human being awakens from the death of conventional thinking, habitual living, and humdrum perception and recognizes what a rare and precious gift life is, with which we are obliged to do something worthy of the capacities with which we are endowed. ...



Be Part of Fulfilling our Mission

BY Liz Jones, Director of Religious Education and Family Ministry

Join one of the Children's Religious Education teaching teams and be part of living out our Mission. You will help create a loving and nurturing community for all our children. They will learn from you both through instruction and your actions what it means to be part of this beloved community. You will also be creating community for yourself as your work with and support the other members of your team. You will offer opportunities to the children in your classes for deepening their spiritual growth and you will also find opportunities to deepen your own. Whenever we engage in walking with others on their spiritual journey we grow as well. Our curricula are chosen to offer our children opportunities to realize that no matter what our age or size, we can make a difference in the world in which we live. This is a lesson that we all need to learn and remember. The act of teaching our children in and of itself is a way you can act out your values. Your involvement with our children is like a pebble dropped in a pond. Each child whose life you touch will touch others and the effect will continue to grow.

We have the special opportunity to strengthen the community within our congregation by joining a teaching team at one of our two campuses. We are all one church and no matter which campus is closest to where you live you are invited to worship at either site. You are also welcome to join a team at whichever site you wish. Each of our services and campuses offers a slightly different program and you can select the one that appeals to you the most – or you may choose to work with a specific team of individuals so you can develop stronger bonds with them. Here are our curricula for next Fall. If you have questions you may contact me at any time – I look forward to hearing from you!

Hillcrest Campus:

9:30

- 2's & 3's: (2 and 3 year-olds)
Celebrating Me and My World
- Pre-K/Kindergarten: (4 and 5 year olds)
Our Religious Journey
- First and Second Grades: (6 and 7 year-olds)
Our Religious Journey
- Third and Fourth Grades: (8 and 9 year-olds)
Holidays and Holy Days
- Fifth and Sixth Grades: (10 and 11 year-olds)
Traditions with a Wink

11:30

- Primary Grades: (4 through 7 year-olds)
Explorations with the Web of Life
- Upper Grades: (8 through 11 year-olds)
Toolbox of Faith

South Bay Campus

10:00

- Combined Ages: (The ages vary, usually 4 through 8 years-old)
Love Surrounds Us

And do not forget our Summer Program! During the summer we recruit for a single week at a time so that you can work around your vacation time and you can try out teaching in our religious education program before making a larger commitment. In our South Bay and Primary Class in the summer, we will be using a curriculum based on our Seven Principles and using Leo Lionni picture books. Our Upper grades will be using a curriculum on Islam as we approach the 10th anniversary of September 11, 2001.

Help us fulfill our Mission and be part of our Children's Religious Education Program!



to create community
to nurture spiritual growth
to act on our values
to help heal the world

Construction Update, April 2011

BY Kath Hillery

This spring the Bard Hall reconstruction project has seen tremendous progress. A number of important milestones have already been met, such as creating a design that will serve our needs many years into the future, securing both short-term and long-term financing, receiving a Site Development Permit from the City of San Diego, and installing an internet camera so we can watch the progress on our computers. The link is on the church's website at <http://www.firstuusandiego.org/CONSTRUCTION-CAM>. Follow the instructions to log in.

Recently, a number of exciting things have happened on campus. The construction fence is up, a portable toilet has been installed outside the north door of the Meeting House, and a ramp has been constructed between the RE wing and the Meeting House. In addition, the asbestos removal process is underway. Once the asbestos is removed, the "soft demolition" can begin. This is the process of removing fixtures such as light switches and sinks so the building demolition can begin in earnest. The demolition will involve salvaging as much material as possible for re-use on site. Material that can't be used on site will be recycled if it is in suitable condition. The amount of material that will be sent to the landfill will be minimal.

The contractor will shortly begin ordering all the supplies that will be needed for the entire project. One of the first projects we will be able to observe will be removing the sewer injector from the driveway. The sewer injector is a pump that carries liquid waste uphill to the sewer main on Front Street. It is only a few years old, so it will be stored and reused. One of the first signs of this project getting underway will be the utility mark-outs that will indicate where the utilities are in the driveway. When the trenching begins, the contractor will be removing and storing the cobblestones for future use in our landscaping. Yes, we will even be recycling rocks.

Also, a mini capitol campaign is being planned. This campaign will allow us to financially support this project and minimize the amount of money we will need to borrow on a short-term basis.



Webcam view in the late afternoon



Susan McLeod
Nominee for Board of Trustees



I joined the church in 1972, when my husband, Doug, and I first moved to San Diego. We both immediately joined the choir; our two children were named in the church and were in the RE program. Our daughter Alison was married in the church in 2002 and is now the DRE at the San Dieguito Fellowship. Work took me away from San Diego in 1986, but First UU has always been my spiritual home. I was very happy to return to San Diego and the church in 2007 when I retired from college teaching and administration. Re-joining the choir was a pleasure, since music has always been an integral part of my worship experience. In 2007, I worked with Rev. Jim Grant on the committee to craft the Church's Covenant of Good Relations; in 2008, I was elected to the Ombuds Committee, serving as its chair for the past two years as it became the Good Relations Committee. I have also helped organize a choral music affinity group, taught in the RE program, and was a visiting steward.

Rose Van Oss
Nominee for Vice President of the Board of Trustees



I was introduced to Unitarianism when I was sixteen in Pennsylvania and was intrigued. Twenty years later, in Illinois, I joined the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship. I started attending First Church when I moved here in 1983 but didn't join until 2000. I've been active in a wide variety of church activities, most recently the Board, Women Together, Bookroom, Intern committee, LGT, Spiritual Friendship Groups, and church office volunteer. My professional life includes a BA in Accounting, an MS in Information Systems and I was a Certified Information Systems Auditor until I retired. I am dedicated to both of the campuses of First Church and our mission in the wider world.

And the nominees are ...

Armin Kuhlman
Nominee for Treasurer



Armin Kuhlman is currently serving as Interim treasurer. Previous related church activities include member and then chair of both the Budget Subcommittee and then the Finance (Stewardship) Committee. Other church activities include current service as an usher and the UUMF. He was also previously on the Membership committee as well as chair of the Environmental Task Force. Armin is also currently Treasurer of the San Diego Foundation for Change. He has been a volunteer with AARP- Tax Aid, READ San Diego literacy tutor and the Sierra Club. With over 30 years accounting, finance and management experience, he is presently interim Controller and Human Resources Manager with a local manufacturing company. He is a Certified Public Accountant and Certified Management Accountant.

Julie McKane
Nominee for Board of Trustees



I first heard about Unitarianism while in high school. Several years later I came to First Church with a friend and have been attending ever since. That was in 1978. Over the years I have been active with Discovery, Voluntary Simplicity, Women's Federation board of directors, UUSC- Fair Trade Coffee coordinator, small ministry groups, dining for dollars, crafting affinity group, and the care giver's network. After 32 years, I officially signed the bond of union in 2010 and attended GA as a delegate in Minneapolis last June. What a great experience. Since I closed my real estate appraiser firm in 2005, I also use my time to volunteering for my AAUW branch, Walkabout International, and with the Balboa Ave redevelopment planning board.

A Journey Towards Wholeness Homily

BY Rev Kathleen Owens



From the Journey Towards Wholeness Service on Jan. 17, 2011 and Reflections by Sara Morrill in [April 2011 First Words](#).

Kathleen's Reflection: Here we are...just folks, trying to live meaningful, intentional lives...loving and embracing diversity...or so we think. It's so easy, isn't it, to agree on principles and ways of being and then to turn around and experience a situation like these skits portrayed? Like what is said in our aspiration, or in our covenant of good relations, doesn't make it pass the Meeting House...or our lips before we're here, in this kind of situation. This is real life...it isn't about judgment – who's right or wrong, good or bad...it's about paying attention, being willing to listen...deeply; it's about speaking up and or stepping back when needed... it's about cultivating a sense of wonder and awe at the complexity of our world and the people in it. One of the ideas presented at our Intercultural Day with Naywah was this: diversity isn't good, isn't bad – it isn't anything; it's our reactions to diversity that give diversity meaning...that's a wonderful thing because we can choose our reactions, especially if we take a breath before we say them, especially if we think before we speak, especially if we choose to slow down, hear in our hearts and heads what we're going to say before we say it. This is so similar to what President Obama stated in his speech on Wednesday night: we can't stop evil in the world, but we can choose how we treat one another. We can choose to use words that heal and not harm. These are spiritual practices because we are a people of faith called to create a world that is just, that is caring; we are called to continue co-creating the Beloved Community.

Author and Compassion activist Karen Armstrong said in describing her new book, [12 Steps to a Compassionate Life](#), "that we are addicted to our likes and dislikes...these addictions can lead to wounding remarks that poison us and the social atmosphere." In our desire to control life, to be okay, and even with the good intention of creating community – (with a definition that community means we all get along and therefore think and feel alike,) we can error on the side of denial and marginalization – which says 'we're all a like', (hurts just to say that – because it isn't true). Armstrong says, "We must become mindful – take note of our behavior, internally monitor our reactions to experiences before we act or speak." This takes some serious effort, deep practice and maybe

even a different way of being with one another. Living in this mindful way slows us down – and offers us the chance to experience community that isn't here because we're all thinking/feeling/saying the same, but rather, to experience a community filled with people who are willing and able to really listen to each other...a community where we pause before responding, and that our responses come with the desire for connection that respects difference. Each one of these skits tells of a true, lived experience. Notice that these skits didn't necessarily end happily ever after but each ended with a willingness to stay engaged. They didn't end with someone huffing off, hurt and mad because something was said or did; they stayed engaged and participated in the sometimes awkward but meaning-filled conversation that said, wait, that hurt and here's why. In this faith tradition we are called to be responsible for what we say and maybe more importantly, for how we listen and choose to react. This is sacred work because it's work grounded in compassion, found throughout the world's faith traditions that say community and our common link is sacred because each of us is sacred – because we are on this planet, because we have the gift of breathing in this room right now. With Journey Toward Wholeness's leadership and support, we ask that you commit yourself to staying engaged in the conversation, in the healing that comes not because we are willing to do the need work; because we are committed to healing hurts and living more fully. Many of you may have taken little red flags as you entered the service. These flags are but symbols and reminders to say slow down, that was painful and together explore the reasons why. They are not penalty flags, you don't get to use them to beat someone over the head with them; they aren't symbols of political correctness, but symbols of compassion – to say wait, something was triggered for me in my experience of life that we need to talk about more deeply, with compassion. Being willing to do this, this is deep work, it's work that requires vulnerability, risk-taking. It's work that requires safe space and a willing to stay engaged, it's work that acknowledges everything won't be made nice – but rather these flags are symbols to call us to deeper conversations about another's experience and reality – one different from our own. Engaging in this work with one another is transformative work that will create a world, a society, a community for us all. It's work that can truly turn the world around.



Norma Wilson

Norma Wilson will be 90 years old on May 9th. An avid gardener, her backyard in Clairemont is a showplace of succulents.

Born in Pasadena, she met her husband in Hawaii. Her husband became a Marine at 17 and fought at Iwo Jima. She encouraged him to go to college after the war and he decided to attend San Diego State, which is how they came here. She taught the first grade while he went to school. He eventually became a principal at an elementary school in San Diego.

She came to First Church in the 1950's when a fellow elementary school teacher, Frances Clare, brought her. After she began attending First Church, she went to a meeting where the speaker mentioned "learning to be comfortable with the unknowable." She was so grateful for this statement not only because it was a comforting sentence, but it expressed what she was looking for in a church. She doesn't need to pray. She doesn't want anyone to tell her what to believe. She wants to be with people who play with the mystery. She never even taught her children to believe in Santa Claus, because her mother had done the same with her.

After retiring from teaching, Norma took up art. She wanted something to do that she had never done before or dreamed of doing. When she took up drawing in a class with nude models, she found it daunting to draw the entire body. So she tried drawing just the person's head or portrait. Using pastels for her medium, portraits were much more manageable for her. Her portraits were in several art shows in the 1980's in downtown San Diego.

An Interview with Norma Wilson

BY Nancy Fisk

Her latest achievement was acceptance into an art show at St. Mark's church, where her portrait of a man was placed at the entrance of the show.

One of her favorite roles at First Church was as co-chair of the Art Guild. Frances Clare volunteered her for the position. Being co-chair was a growth experience for her because she didn't know how to plan an art show when she began. She wasn't an artist at the time she headed the Art Guild. One accomplishment of the Art Guild during her tenure was the commissioning of the Stele, that was placed in front of the church and had the church's aspiration engraved on it.

In the 1980s, her son, Randy, came out to her as a gay man. Before this, she had never known anyone who was gay. Because First Church was open to the LGBT community at the time, she was able to find the resources to educate herself about this community. Later, when her son died of AIDS, she says the church saved her. She attended a meeting that she found in the church newsletter where she could find support in learning about AIDS and its devastation. It was here that she connected with Larry Baza, a church member who helped her with her grief. She says, "There was something about the way he understood me, and he was willing to give."

Years after her son died, she wrote a booklet of poems in honor of him. One of those poems includes her spiritual philosophy:

Many years ago/A wise man /Said to me
Search for truth/Let curiosity /Take you where it will
Learn to be comfortable with the unknowable.

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Sermon audio podcasts and subscriptions:
<http://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/sermons-2011/id425037730>

Sermon videocasts and follow up links:
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