



# FirstWords

A publication of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego

**StoryCorps**  
Every voice matters.

## WHO WE ARE, AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

BY KATH HILLERY

Perhaps you've heard the touching stories on NPR, with a husband and wife, a father and daughter, or two friends remembering important moments in the lives, that we get to listen in on for a few minutes every Friday morning on a program called [StoryCorps](#). Since 2003, *StoryCorps* has archived over 50,000 recordings of one-on-one interviews. Initially, these recordings were made by audio professionals, with state-of-the-art equipment. The recordings are archived in perpetuity at the [American Folklife Center](#) at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Recently, *StoryCorps* created an app (application) for smartphones and tablets that allows you to be the person who makes the recording. You can then submit your recording to the *StoryCorps* website to be archived.

Here at First Church, Kath Hillery and Nancy Fisk, and others, are spearheading an effort to capture many of the voices at First Church. The project is dubbed "Who We Are," and it aims to contribute First Church voices to *StoryCorps*, to give others a sense of what it means to be a First Church member. The [StoryCorps app](#) will be used to record interviews between First Church members about how they came to First Church, and about the activities and issues that keep them here as members. The "Who We Are" program will facilitate interviews between church members and assist in saving the interview on the *StoryCorps* site. Special church-related questions geared toward explaining your relationship to the church have been compiled. Excerpts of the recordings can be used to share with newcomers to First Church to better understand what it means to belong to this community.

The app allows you to select questions for the interview, and then automatically records the interview straight to your smartphone or tablet. At the end of the interview, the participants take a photograph to commemorate their sharing experience. The interviews can be posted to the *StoryCorps* website by touching one additional button.

We invite everyone in the church community to participate. If you're ready to tackle this on your own, you can find the suggested question list on the [First Church website](#). You and your partner should select 5 to 7 questions for each interview. It's a good idea to do a practice interview before you start recording. When you're done, the app will invite you to take a picture of the pair of you and upload the interview. When the app prompts for keywords, use the words "church," "First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego," "Unitarian Universalist," "First UU Church of San Diego," and "San Diego." Using these keywords makes it easy for everyone to find our special collection of interviews.

If you need more guidance, or want to participate but don't have the equipment or a partner, look for the "Who We Are" patio table after services to sign up for a time to learn how to use the app. If you like, you can also make an appointment at the table to do the interview at church, with the space and equipment provided for you at church.

You can listen to an [interview](#) with Nancy Fisk by going to the *StoryCorps* app website at [www.StoryCorps.me](#) and click on Browse, and then search for the keyword "First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego" by typing in the box with the magnifying glass.

We hope this will become a growing program, as more and more people become adept at the app. There are so many stories here at First Church. We hope you'll be inspired to provide yours, help others tell theirs and listen to the stories of other First Church members. For more information, visit the [Who We Are StoryCorps page](#) on our website.

### Also in this issue:

- Welcome Back to a New Church Year, Rev Kathleen Owens [Pg 2](#)
- September's Sermon Messages [Pg 2](#)
- New Adventures, New Beginnings [Pg 3](#)
- Emerging Voices, Voices in Unity, and Women's Choirs [Pg 4](#)
- The First Church Bookroom [Pg 5](#)
- Our Friends in Transylvania [Pg 6](#)
- Meet Megan Dowdell, Our New Intern Minister, [Pg 7](#)



## WELCOME BACK TO A NEW CHURCH YEAR

BY REV. KATHLEEN OWENS, LEAD MINISTER

Welcome back! For many people, summer is a time of vacations, or at least a time off from the usual routine of life. This has been true for First Church at both of our campuses, as well. The Hillcrest campus offered one Sunday morning service. Both our Hillcrest and South Bay campuses offered community building activities after the service. There were many highlights from this experiment and I hope you'll visit the [Ministers' Blog](#) later this month to learn more details about this experiment and what we learned. [<http://www.firstusandiego.org/kathleens-blog>]

Now it's September and time to offer a welcome back to our regular 9:30 and 11:30 a.m. service times and program. It's time to welcome back our choirs and other program areas that were less active. And it's an important time to welcome the Rev. Ian W. Riddell as our Minister of Music and Worship Arts. He started in August and is fully involved in the ministry and life of the congregation. His primary responsibility will be to oversee, strengthen and continue developing the music program. He'll also preach, teach, offer pastoral care, and create worship opportunities beyond Sunday morning.

It's also time to welcome our Intern Minister, Megan Dowdell. She comes to us from Starr King School for the Ministry and is our full-time intern minister. She'll serve both of our campuses. We're also welcoming our Student Minister, Tania Marquez, First Church member who attends our South Bay campus. She comes to us from Meadville Lombard Theological School and will serve our Hillcrest campus part-time this year. I'm delighted to work with both of them this year and so very proud that our church is so dedicated to being a teaching congregation. And, I'm very thankful for the lay leaders who will support Megan and Tania in their learning experiences this year.

I want to welcome you into this exciting new church season – brimming with more opportunities for building community, different experiences to nurture spiritual growth, and many ways to act on our values to help heal the world. Welcome to a time and place of learning, exploring, healing, and celebrating life!

## September 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 September Transformational Theme is  
Acceptance

### Sunday, September 6:

Hillcrest Multigenerational Service—  
"Laboring Together,"

Rev Kathleen Owens, Lead Minister

South Bay Multigenerational Service—

"Solidarity," Rev Jennifer Channin,  
Assistant Minister; Kristen Kuriga, South  
Bay Ministry Team Coordinator

### Sunday, September 13:

Hillcrest Service—

"Invisible Harbors,"

Megan Dowdell, Intern Minister

South Bay Service—

"Answer 'Yes'!," Rev Jennifer  
Channin, Assistant Minister

### Sunday, September 20:

Hillcrest Service—

"A Time for Turning: Celebrating Rosh  
Hashanah,"

Rev Kathleen Owens, Lead Minister

South Bay Service—

"International Day of Peace,"  
Megan Dowdell, Intern Minister

### Sunday, September 27:

Hillcrest Service—

"Answer 'Yes'!," Rev Jennifer  
Channin, Assistant Minister

South Bay Service—

"Learning Again: Lessons from the  
Jewish High Holy Days,"  
Rev Kathleen Owens, Lead Minister



## NEW ADVENTURES, NEW BEGINNINGS

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

Fall is a time of new adventures and new beginnings. Each fall we embark on a new journey together of learning, growing, and creating. This fall is no different. Throughout the year, we'll find and create ways to learn in multigenerational settings, such as the new multigenerational Handbell choir and multigenerational worship at both campuses. This is exciting since it will give us ways to learn from young and old alike.

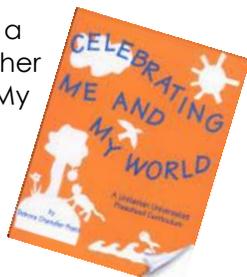
This year, our children's Religious Education program will center on creating and affirming Unitarian Universalist identity with a particular focus on the seven UU principles. We'll offer four classes at the 9:30 service and one at the 11:30 service.

### 9:30 a.m. Classes:

- 2-3 year olds: Celebrating Me and My World
- 4 y/o+: World of Wonder
- 7 y/o+: Jedi Academy (inspired by Star Wars)
- 10 y/o+: Leadership Academy/Jr. RE assistant program

### 11:30 a.m. Class: 5 y/o+: Rainbow Adventurers

We'll once again offer our toddlers a chance to grow and explore together through the "Celebrating Me and My World" curriculum. This gently programmed class introduces young ones to classroom time and ritual through chalice lightings, stories, activities and free play.



principle through a year-long nature based curriculum.

The lower elementary class will use the "World of Wonder" which focuses on the 7th



The upper elementary class (7 years and older) will begin their journey toward becoming Jedi Knights in this year's "Jedi Academy"—a Unitarian Universalist curriculum inspired by Star Wars. Through challenges, activities, and spiritual practices, participants will complete a year-long training focused on developing mindfulness, peace, and justice.

The 5-6th graders have the opportunity to participate in the Leadership Academy where, two Sundays a month, they'll work with mentors to form community, nurture spiritual growth, and act on their values to heal the world. The other Sundays, participants will take on leadership roles around our community.

At 11:30, we'll once again have our Rainbow Adventurers which gives children of all ages the opportunity to explore the UU principles through stories and child-directed activity. This class will also continue to tend the garden created by the summer Religious Education classes.



New this year, we'll be offering a monthly Parents' Lounge during service. This peer-led conversation is a time for parents of elementary-aged children to gather and connect on issues and topics that matter to them. The first Parents' Lounge will be October 4th. All parents are welcome to join. We have a space for you to learn and grow with our kids!

Do you want to be a part of the amazing adventure of learning this year? We're currently accepting applications for Children's Religious Education classroom leaders. Leaders commit to one service for 1-2 Sundays a month. This is an amazing opportunity to learn with our kids! E-mail Dr. Melissa at [melissa@firstuusandiego.org](mailto:melissa@firstuusandiego.org).

# EMERGING VOICES, VOICES IN UNITY, AND WOMEN'S CHOIRS

BY LYNN MENDOZA-KHAN, DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN/YOUTH AND WOMEN'S CHOIRS



I've been the choir director here at First Church for the Children's and Youth choirs for many years now. I've enjoyed and found fulfillment in working with the "Emerging Voices" children's choir and the "Voices in Unity" youth choir over the years, because of the wonderful singers and their families. It also reminds me of the significant impact of music I experienced, singing as a child. Each chorister feels like an extension of my own family as we go through the year getting to know each other. I'm also a private voice teacher and musical director for various musical theatre productions around San Diego.



**Voices in Unity** is our Youth Choir, ages 13-18, and meets in Clarks Chapel Sundays at 12:45 pm. **Emerging**

**Voices** is our Children's choir, ages 5-12, and meets in Clark Chapel Sundays at 2:30pm. We're accepting singers this fall beginning Sept. 13th. No prior singing experience is necessary.

The children in Emerging Voices are taught musicianship skills and vocal technique skills that are age appropriate. I use these tools to empower young singers to be precise and deliberate in their communication of the message of the music. The choral selections center on Unitarian values and principles, and train each singer to transition into Voices in Unity youth choir, ready to take on a larger repertoire and more complex music.

Voices in Unity singers can expect to sing between 7-9 choral selections a semester. More attention is given to vocal technique and how to sing different styles of music. In addition to their instruction during regular rehearsals, they are given individual coaching from myself and Justin Murphy-Mancini, our accompanist, as they prepare solos, duets and small ensembles for our two annual concerts. Our Fall concert is December 5th and the Spring concert will be June 11th.

It's my intention and hope that members of Voices in Unity who transition out of this choir will take with them a positive experience of Unitarian Universalists, knowing that wherever they end up in

life they can find a welcoming presence in their local UU church or fellowship. If they stay in San Diego, we can offer them several adult choral options here at First Church.

If your child or youth wishes to be a member of our children's or youth choirs, please contact me at [lynnmendozakhn@gmail.com](mailto:lynnmendozakhn@gmail.com) or come to the first rehearsals on September 13th.



My vision in starting the **Women's Choir** at First UU of San Diego is that it would attract all women seeking to be in a safe nurturing environment to explore and develop their

singing voice with the intention to communicate inspiring messages of the human experience such as love, peace, struggle, grief and transcendence.

It's my hope that each person who sings with us will find a supportive community of women ready to share their struggles and joys. Music has the power to "Heal the Wounded Soul." It's also a powerful way to express the full range of emotion. There's a vast amount of music that highlights the beauty of women's voices and I'm thrilled to have it experienced both as a singer and listener.

This choir enjoys a range of experience but no prior singing or choral experience is necessary (yes, even you shower singers). I ask that you can match pitch and leave the rest to me!

Please feel free to attend a rehearsal and commit when you feel ready. We meet Thursdays in the chapel from 7pm-8:30pm. Our choral year begins the week after Labor Day each year. This year we begin September 10th. Our year ends in June after the All Music Sunday music festival (date to be determined).



## THE FIRST CHURCH BOOKROOM

BY SUE MARBERRY

The bookroom was built around 1980, under the direction of Wally Millson, and is named in his honor. Before that time, books from Beacon Press were set out on a single cart that was rolled onto the patio and then back into Bard Hall with all the ordering, sorting and pricing of books was done at the Millson home. The new space, built under the eave along the narthex, made it possible to offer used books and magazines. At various time in the past, the bookroom has also sold sermon reprints, tapes and then CDs of church services, and other UU items.

The portrait on the back wall is of Carol Williams, former bookroom chair, who established the children's corner, brought in the small furniture, and made it a favorite place for many young readers over the years.



The money from the weekly sale of books goes directly into the church's operating funds. In past years we've been able to add about \$10,000 to the budget, though as electronic readers have gained in popularity we're seeing a reduction in book sales.

When books are donated, a sticker is placed on each one to identify the month it came in, and before being placed on the carts outside. Unsold books are rotated inside monthly and shelved. Non-fiction is in categories are found on the right side of the room, and fiction (by author) is on the left. All our books—except children's and those from the UUA—are sold for the same price: \$3 for hardcovers, and \$1 for paperbacks. Children's books are not priced; purchasers pay what they wish. Magazines are \$.35 each, or 3 for \$1.

The bookroom doesn't accept textbooks, books that have been damaged or written in, VHS or cassette tapes, or magazines more than three months old.



New books from the UUA are sold for our congregants' and visitors' convenience, education, and enjoyment. The most popular and often requested books are

those which introduce Unitarian Universalism and a variety of books for adults and children. These include meditations, poetry, philosophy, and some new titles of interest to military families. The taxes and shipping the bookroom pays are included in the price on the red sticker. The church receives a small discount for some books when ordered in quantity. When they're sold, the bookroom makes a small profit.

Books on the shelf for a very long time, duplicates, and those not in the best condition, put aside for 5th Sundays, when they are sold for special low prices or just given away. Occasionally, if shelves are overcrowded, folks may be invited inside for a special price sale on a particular category. There will be one more 5th Sunday sale this calendar year—on November 29th.

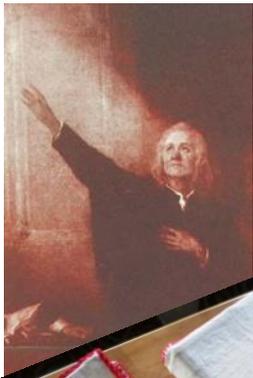
Gail Edwards, Caroline Clark and I, the current co-chairs, have been volunteering in the bookroom for a combined total of over 30 years. We all started as regular volunteers with a mutual love of books, and we're always looking for more volunteers. We try to have two people at each service—one handling the cash inside, one assisting outside. There's usually work to be done, such as sorting and shelving books, putting out new ones, or weeding out old magazines. Each volunteer works for one service each month, gets first choice to purchase books coming in, and may also borrow books. Contact Caroline Clark

([uucaroline@cox.net](mailto:uucaroline@cox.net)) if you'd like to join us.



# OUR FRIENDS IN TRANSYLVANIA

BY DAN RATELLE, TRANSYLVANIAN PARTNER CHURCH COMMITTEE



Maybe you've noticed the large framed picture of Francis David that hangs in the back of our Meeting House, or those lovely cloth covers on some of our hymnbooks. Did you know these are gifts from one of our Partner Churches and that those covers were handmade by members of their congregation? This special relationship with the First Unitarian Church of Brasso, Romania, began over 20 years ago, when the UUA encouraged connections between North American UU congregations and Unitarian Churches in Transylvania, the historic birthplace of Unitarianism.



Since then, there have been letters and visits in both directions. Their minister, Rev. Sandor, has been in our pulpit several times and, in 1995, more than 50 of us journeyed through Transylvania on a Friendship Tour. Our Choir performed several concerts, and through homestays and visits to historic Unitarian sites, we got to know these spiritual kin and learned much about our UU heritage, about that fascinating part of the world, and about what it meant to be a Unitarian in eastern Europe during all of the changes of the 20th Century.

During the Communist era, persecution and secret police were very real threats, but afterwards our Partners faced new challenges, as many of their young people left to find work in the west. Joint visioning between the Brasso church and our congregation came up with the idea of a new multipurpose building to house classes, social service programs, and guest accommodations. This would give them greater impact in the community, as well as help to generate some income. Our Church helped get this project started, and we've continued to provide aid during the years of construction.



By 2008, the basement and bottom floor were complete, and a pilgrimage of 16 members from our Church, led by our former Lead Minister, Rev. Arvid Straube, was there for the building dedication, along with the city's Mayor. Our Members participated in the special services and experienced Brasso's snow-covered streets. Several years later, the Brasso congregation was excited to watch the construction of our own new Welcome Center.

With benefit concerts and generosity offerings, our congregation continues to help with construction of their building. In recognition of our efforts, when completed, the building will be named "San Diego Friendship Hall." This February, a fierce storm literally blew off the stucco and insulation "skin" from parts of the outside of the building, but progress continues. The 2nd and 3rd floors are well underway, and this July, I paid a visit to, and stayed in the first completed guest suite!

It's been wonderful to see this vision (San Diego Friendship Hall) come into being, and to see the maturing of the Partner Church program. This year, many UU churches in the U.S. and Canada have partner relationships all over the world. Our second partner church is in the Philippines.

Today, a UU Partner Church Council, works to foster these connections, and helps organize group and individual trips. From these relationships, we've gained a greater sense of our own history as well as of the role of this faith in the larger community. The UU message has much to offer this fractured world. It's my hope that we'll be able to keep alive the flame of this very special "Larger UU Connections" relationship.

If you'd like to learn more about our Partner Church program, you can find information and pictures at [First Church's Partner Church web pages](#), or contact Dan Ratelle at [dan@firstuusandiego.org](mailto:dan@firstuusandiego.org).



## MEET MEGAN DOWDELL, OUR NEW INTERN MINISTER

It is wonderful to have arrived at First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego! I am so excited about what we will do together this year. I come to you most immediately from Los Angeles, but I have spent the majority of my time on the West Coast in the San Francisco Bay Area. I grew up in our congregation in Beverly, Massachusetts and attended Simmons College in Boston. Shortly after graduation, I made the cross country trip to Berkeley, California to study at Pacific School of Religion and the Graduate Theological Union (GTU). After completing a Master of Arts in Ethics and Social Theory from the GTU, I returned to graduate school to begin doctoral study focused on racial disparities in health care and bioethics, eventually through the Sociology Program at the University of California San Francisco. Yet, my heart and soul sit at the intersections of the academy, faith, and community, knowing that is where social and cultural transformation for the health and wholeness of entire populations can truly take place.

Since 2009, I have been teaching courses in countering oppression, health ethics, sexual ethics, theological reflection, and youth ministry at Starr King School for the Ministry, the UU member school of the GTU. Over the years, my role on the faculty has expanded. I am now Visiting Assistant Professor for Ethics and Society, offering courses and serving as faculty advisor for students in the Master of Divinity and Master of Arts for Social Change degree programs. I am blessed to have a thriving teaching ministry and be afforded the opportunity to take a year-long leave of absence from my dissertation research to continue the process to become a fellowshipped Unitarian Universalist minister. I still have much to learn, and I am thrilled to be doing it here in San Diego at your bold, dynamic church.

What inspires me most about this congregation is the legacy of social justice advocacy, living our UU values out in public for the benefit of San Diego County and its diverse, beautiful communities. I am reminded of Cornel West's remarks in the Ware Lecture at the UUA General Assembly 2015: "Integrity has to do with what is the quality of your courage and your willingness to bear witness radically against the grain even if you have to sacrifice something precious including your popularity." I am just beginning to know the details of all that members of this congregation do for each other and our often ailing world, even when it's a challenge and there is much at stake. I am honored to sit among you even if just for a short time.



**my heart and soul sit at the intersections of the academy, faith, and community, knowing that is where social and cultural transformation for the health and wholeness of entire populations can truly take place**



**Staff**

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 Rev. Jennifer Channin, Assistant Minister  
 Rev. Ian W. Riddell, Minister of Music and Worship Arts  
 Megan Dowdell, Intern Minister  
 Rev. Jim Grant, Affiliate Minister  
 Robie Evans, Director of Operations  
 Dr. Melissa James, Director of Children and Family Ministry  
 Daniel Ratelle, Hillcrest Choir Director  
 Lynn Mendoza-Khan, Choir Director  
 Lorelei Isidro, South Bay Music Coordinator  
 Andrea Newall, JUUL Tones Ensemble Director  
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 Brenda Garcia, Administrative Assistant  
 Käthe Larick, Youth Programs Coordinator  
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South Bay Campus:

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

To view sermon video casts, click on these YouTube or Vimeo buttons:



Giving: <http://www.firstuusaniego.org/giving-overview>

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