



FirstWords

A publication of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego

Rev. Mark Morrison Reed

by Tony Brumfield

I am, in fact, a descendant of all who came together in this ethnic cauldron, I am what I am.

Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed is an Afro-American Unitarian Universalist who has served with his wife, Donna, as minister at Unitarian Universalist churches in Rochester, New York, and Toronto, Ontario for 26 years. He is also an historian who has looked deeply into his own multiracial, multicultural past and the long struggle of Unitarian Universalism with issues of race and power. First Church's Dr. Rev. Arvid Straube was a student with Rev. Morrison-Reed at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago in the 1970s.

Rev. Morrison-Reed identifies as Afro-American, not African-American. "Afro-American" refers to those who have roots in the United States that go back to slavery. "African-American" refers to more recent immigrants of African ancestry. In his words, "My own heritage as an Afro-American is rich. I am the amalgamation of all my ancestors: Universalist and Unitarian; Mende and Bolum [ethnic groups in Sierra Leone], English and Scottish, Native American, French Huguenot, perhaps Fijian and whatever else. I am the progeny of plantation owners, slave traders, and slaves, of those who fought for the Confederacy and for the Union, a state senator and a seafarer, strong matriarchs and dutiful men. I am, in fact, a descendant of all who came together in this ethnic cauldron, and no one has a stronger claim on being Afro-American or All-American than I. I am what I am. I refuse to disown white Confederate Joe Gregory, or to pick and choose among my ancestors."



Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed is at First Church April 30 through May 2, thanks to funds from the Helen Myers Forum. Friday evening he will present a program which has some readings from his new book, *In Between: Memoir of an Integration Baby* (2009). He will talk about writing his first book, *Black Pioneers in a White Denomination* (1980), and his collection of worship readings, *Been in the Storm So Long* (1991). There will also be a question and answer session and a book signing. Copies of his latest book will be available for purchase.

Rev. Morrison-Reed has recently focused his research on what is called the black empowerment controversy (1968-1970), one of the most painful events in Unitarian Universalist history. Saturday's program will focus on this controversy.

On Sunday, he will preach a sermon entitled "Dragged Kicking and Screaming into Heaven." His sermon will review how early in the 19th century, Universalism swept across our young nation finding a popularity it never again achieved. He asks us, "Is it time for us to return to that message?"

Mark Morrison-Reed's latest book, In Between, is currently available at the church bookstore.



Arvid's Arcana

BY Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

////// What I Mean When I Say 'God' ////

Saying the word 'God' around here is not always a skillful thing to do if your intent is to communicate. I strongly suspect that everyone has a completely different meaning in mind when they use or hear that word. Many a person has had the concept of God used as a bludgeon of shame in their past within an oppressive religion. For some, God is the harsh judge who condemns poor fallible humans to everlasting torment for the least transgression. Others, educated as they may be in most areas, cannot conceive of God beyond the great father in the sky who interferes in human affairs, the idea they learned in their childhood. Well I don't believe in those Gods either. But the concept of God does have meaning in my experience. Mindful of the sensitivities of others about the word, I generally will use any other word that will convey my meaning if I can. But I thought you might like to know what I mean when I use that word.

In my opinion, the person who has written most clearly about this is my late friend and colleague, Forrest Church, for many years senior minister of All Souls Unitarian Church in Manhattan. In his book *Bringing God Home*, he writes, "The ancient Hebrews recognized that 'God' is not God's name. God is our name for a power that is greater than all and yet present in each, the Holy, Being itself." Also in that book, Forrest held that "Anyone who embraces the familiar definition that 'God is love' discovers God's nature in his or her own experiences of love."

Theologian Paul Tillich defined God as the Ground Of Being. Not a personal God separate from the universe, but the very essence of all that is and all that can be. As such, God is beyond any human ability to define. As we say when we extinguish the chalice for a church member who has died, "In mystery we are born, in mystery we live, in mystery we die." The Lakota Indian word translated as God into English is more literally translated as Great Mystery. Perhaps you are more comfortable with that term. Or perhaps Spirit. Or The Force. Or Higher Power. Emerson called God the Oversoul in which each individual soul partakes. The Pragmatist philosopher and Unitarian, Henry Nelson Wieman, defined God as "That force, perfect alignment with which yields the greatest human good."

For some--for me--prayer means, among other things, a conscious contact with that which has created all that exists--which is creating me at every moment. People ask me: Do I believe in God? And the answer is that believing or not believing is beside the point. For me, God is experienced, not believed in. My spiritual growth has been measured more by the ideas about God that I have given up than the ideas about God that I have gained. Mystery. Close as breathing. Amen.

April Sermons

Service Times:

Hillcrest Campus:

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

Vespers: Second Wednesday, 5:30 p.m.

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

April's Transformational Theme is
Wholeness, Healing, and Salvation.

Intergenerational Easter Celebration. Easter services at First Church center on our UU tradition of Flower Communion. You are asked to bring a flower to the service to represent your unique spirit. It will be shared with another during the service.

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

April 4 — Hillcrest

Easter Sermon, Life Again

- Elka Cartmell Ladd

April 4 — South Bay

Growing Toward Wholeness: The Stories We Tell

- Rev. Kathleen Owens

April 11 — Hillcrest

Broke Open Arvid: How Difficult Times Help Us Grow

- - Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

April 11 — South Bay

Unitarian Universalism's Saving Message

What is Salvation to a Unitarian Universalist? Does the message of our faith save lives? Do we, as our President Peter Morales argues, have a moral imperative to share this message with others? How do we square this with our aversion to evangelism?

- Elka Cartmell Ladd

Vespers, April 14 — Hillcrest

Halleluiah! An extended reflection on the song and poem by Leonard Cohen of the same title. The poem affirms the praise of life even in affliction and difficulty. Our own Chris Hassett will perform the song.

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

April 18 — Hillcrest

Growing Toward Wholeness: The Stories We Tell

- Rev. Kathleen Owens

April 18 — South Bay

Saved From What? Saved For What? Unitarian Universalist don't believe anyone needs to be saved from hell. Is there anything we need to be saved from--or for?

April 25 — Hillcrest

Halleluiah!

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

April 25 — South Bay

Rites of Passage

BY Kathè Larick, Youth Director

Our faith tradition observes many rituals to honor the transformative times in our lives. From child dedication services which mark the beginning of an individual's journey to memorial services which honor lives spent in love and service, it is our history to celebrate these occasions as a community. One such rite will soon be upon us as we gather on Sunday, May 23rd to celebrate the passage from youth to young adulthood for seventeen of our Senior High youth. We refer to this passage as "bridging."

In my nine years as a youth advisor I've seen many bridging ceremonies; however I have never seen quite so many youth embark on this journey together before. Many of these youth have grown up in our church and as they make their way out into the world and, for many, leave the homes they have known the last 18 years of their lives, it is only fitting that we send them along their way with our love and best wishes for the future.

But we also give them much more to take with them on this expedition into young adulthood; we give them a firm ethical and spiritual foundation upon which to stand tall, as well as encouragement to continue to grow and learn and become whole human beings who can heal the world. We also give these young people a loving and caring community to call their own, a spiritual home whose doors are always open to them.

The progression from youth to young adult is an incredibly huge transition. Think about your own journey – were you calm, confident or just plain petrified at the notion of leaving your parent's home? To give our youth a leg up to begin this journey, Alice King and I have created a new bridging program designed to provide some practical tools for life as independent young adults. It began last month with a weekend retreat to the desert. We talked about our spiritual foundation and spiritual needs as well as the more mundane topics of managing money and keeping a calendar. We talked about our relationships and how they change, how to live with roommates and how to communicate in an open, honest

and assertive way. The program will conclude next month with a physical walk across the Vermont Street Bridge followed by a lunch with parents and friends, games with members of First Church's current young adult community and a closing ceremony.

But the final part of the program involves the whole church community. I hope that you will attend the Bridging service on May 23rd and send these wonderful young people on their voyage into adulthood. With the love and support of this faith community, they can go confidently into the world and meet whatever challenges they might encounter, secure in the knowledge that they will always have a spiritual home here at First Church.

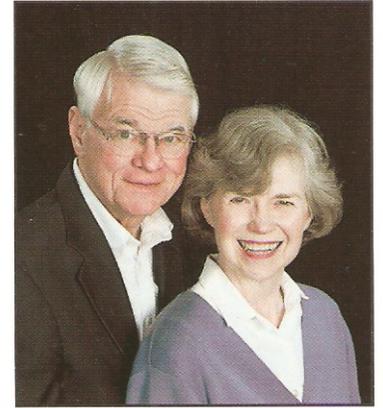


Justice Delayed, Justice denied

BY Mike and Penny Moreau

"Tim is missing." With that frightening phone call from our son's landlady in January 1990, we began a long, painful journey. Eight and a half years later we finally found out what happened to Tim. He had been strangled to death with a garrote made out of microphone wire and pieces of a broom handle. The two killers buried him in a chest-deep grave they had dug two days earlier. The apparent motive was to keep Tim from reporting to the police illegal activity (a counterfeit ticket scheme) at the concert hall where he worked. The killers were Tim's boss and a sound technician. Both accepted plea deals rather than going to trial. Both have been released from prison. Tim's remains have never been found.

We knew very little about the criminal justice system at that time. Twenty years later we are acutely aware of the lack of balance between the rights of the accused and the rights of crime victims. For instance, our US Constitution has 17 references to rights of those accused of crime. Crime victims are not mentioned once in the Constitution. To help with our own healing process, we started working with other victims of violence. We serve on the board of the San Diego chapter of Parents Of Murdered Children. The National Or-



Mike and Penny Moreau

ganization of Parents Of Murdered Children, Inc. (POMC) is the only national self-help organization dedicated solely to the aftermath and prevention of murder (www.pomc.org).

Mike is also on the board of the Victim Assistance Coordinating Council (VACC), a San Diego nonprofit umbrella organization. VACC is composed of crime victims and a broad representation of service providers vitally involved in various aspects of crime victim assistance (www.sdvacc.com).

Additionally, we participate each April in Crime Victims' Rights week, a program of the Office for Victims of Crime within the United States Department of Justice. The date this year is April 18-24 and the theme is "Fairness, Dignity, Respect". Communities throughout the country hold programs promoting victims' rights and honoring crime victims and those who advocate on their behalf. We know from our own personal experience one of the greatest fears survivors of murder victims have is that their loved ones will be forgotten. In San Diego, the Victim Assistance Coordinating Council will host a Candlelight Tribute to remember victims of crime. District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis will be the guest speaker. Three crime victims will tell their stories. A special slide presentation will honor the victims. It is open to the public and is scheduled on Monday, April 19th, 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 pm at the Police Officers' Association, 8388 Vickers Street. For more information, please contact Mike and Penny Moreau (858) 384-6216 or mikeandpenny@san.rr.com.



New Home for UUs of the South Bay

BY Martin Kruming

UUU of South Bay, a campus of First UU Church of San Diego, celebrated the dedication of its new Chula Vista home last Sunday morning with a service titled, "Grace Across the Ages." More than 50 persons, including a Southwestern College student who lives in Tijuana, gathered at the site in a small strip mall only minutes east of Interstate 5. "Get some clapping going," urged Dana Decker, the Contemporary Music Associate and leader of the four-member band, as a packed room of members and visitors sang "Come Alive With the Spirit" from words projected on the wall.

"We all fall ...
Grace will
catch us."

Grace is al-
ways dancing;
grace is always
singing."

UUU of the South Bay has relocated to 970 Broadway in Chula Vista from an elementary school in a residential neighborhood much farther east.

During her sermon, Intern Minister Elka Cartmell Ladd talked about the many marvelous aspects of grace which move through all of us. Seated nearby was Mar Cardenas, the South Bay Ministry Team Coordinator who contributed so much to the discovery and preparation of this new home. Using head phones, she translated for a Spanish-speaking visitor.

"Grace is always dancing; grace is always singing," said Elka, noting at one point that one of her favorite television shows is called "So You Think You Can Dance." Afterward, during the singing of "Amazing Grace," the words on the wall went blank except for "no disk." But it didn't matter; the congregation continued to sing anyway. After all, as Elka had said: "We all fall ... Grace will catch us."



UUU of the South Bay

A campus of First Unitarian
Universalist Church of San Diego

Later, everyone gathered to show their affection for Mar, who along with others worked until the last moment getting ready for the special moment. "This day means so much for so many of us," she said. "I love you," to which one member replied, "We love you, too." As Elka said during her sermon, "This space is what we make of it."

This article first appeared in the San Diego UU Network Newsletter on Feb. 10, 2010.

Nominating Committee

Every year, the Nominating Committee is charged with preparing a list of nominees for the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees represents the congregation in governing the church. The Board is primarily focused on visioning and how to achieve that vision through its actions and policies. Working within a policy governance structure, the Board has general oversight of all of the affairs of the church.

The Nominating Committee's list of candidates will be announced on Friday, April 16, 2010. Election of Board of Trustees and Officers will be at the Annual Meeting in June.

Officers to be elected include a **Vice President, Treasurer**, and five additional **Trustees**. The Vice President serves for three years (VP, President, and Past President). The Treasurer serves for one year, and the additional trustees serve for three years. Occasionally a resignation may require a replacement trustee to complete another's term. All pledging members of at least one year's duration are eligible to be nominated.

There is a petition process for others who might wish to serve on the Board of Trustees in one of the above positions. Petitions will be available on April 16, 2010 in the church office. They are due back in the church office by May 7, 2010, at 4:30 P.M.

Thank you, Ann

If you have questions you may contact a Nominating Committee Co-Chairs, Ann McDonald at 619-464-1937 or Gail Edwards at 619-303-8939. We welcome your interest and participation.

How will you use the power that social media has given you?

BY Elka Cartmell Ladd, Intern Minister

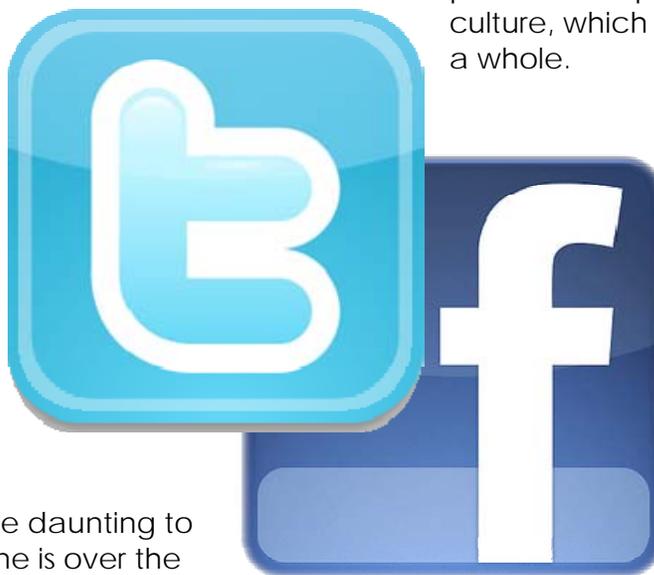
I am always looking for ways to see the inter-connection of our global community. One of the most striking things about social media is that it has made visible how connected we are.

Social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, have great power to facilitate our awareness of how we fit into the web of the human family. Through these tools we are able to be a part of each others' lives in new ways, despite our busy-ness and sometimes despite great distances. Even with those whom we see regularly, we are offered an opportunity to connect differently and more deeply.

These technologies can be daunting to a newcomer, but once one is over the learning curve the possibilities are endless. Social media has changed the way people market, organize politically, and relate to one another. It is changing our entire culture, and churches from across denominations are learning that resistance is futile.

Moreover, churches are learning that embracing these technologies can strengthen their physical communities in unforeseen ways. They hold the power to enhance our relationships with each other, deepen our conversations on the patio, and keep us connected throughout the week. They also hold the power to help this congregation to shine more brightly in the world, as a welcoming community for those who seek a spiritual home and as a beacon of love and justice making in our world.

Through the popularity of social media tools and other user-driven websites, such as Wikipedia, the entire Internet is shifting in this direction. No longer does one need to speak programming languages to be able to use the web to make their voice count or to create something new and exciting. More and more, each individual is being given the power to shape the direction of our online culture, which in turn affects our culture as a whole.



With this power comes the responsibility to be a part of shaping where these technologies will go. They are open to everyone, which means that those who wish to isolate us from one another for their own gain or who want to breed fear, oppression and hatred are already using these tools to do so. On the other hand, as more of us bring our values into this realm, the more we can create the culture of our aspirations.

Social media celebrates the importance and power of each individual voice within the great web of humanity. How Unitarian Universalist!

This month, First Church's website will be resurrected in an exciting new format that embraces user-driven technology and interfaces with social media initiatives that we have been exploring. Educational opportunities are being offered for those who desire some training in how to use social media appropriately and effectively. I look forward to sharing ideas with you and reshaping First Church's web presence with you so that we are a part of shaping the world.

The San Diego Organizing Project and First Church

BY **Derek Statts**, Social Justice Ministry Team and San Diego Organizing Project board member representing First UU Church of San Diego

Each Sunday in April, the generosity offering will be given to the San Diego Organizing Project to support their work. Every week you can find out more about the work of the organization at the Social Justice Ministry Team Table on the Hillcrest Campus and the Get Involved Table on the South Bay Campus. On April 11, educational forums will be held to find out more about the work of the project. These forums will take place between services and after second service on the Hillcrest Campus; watch the Window newsletter for more details. Then the Social Justice Ministry Team will reflect on how to move forward with First Church's relationship with the organization.

Why does First Church contribute to the San Diego Organizing Project? Why have some members and friends spent many hours working with the organization? Why do I?

San Diego Organizing Project is a grass-roots organization that helps develop leaders in churches, helps churches work on local issues, and provides the structure for churches to work together on city and county issues. With the People Improving Communities Through Organizing (PICO) national network and PICO California, the San Diego group works at the national and state levels. At the city level, the organization has had many successes for over 30 years including the following:

- ✧ San Diego Organizing Project's "Affordable Housing for All" campaign, for which the Organizing for Justice action group at First Church organized and hosted forums with four City Council members. The campaign resulted in the Council declaring a State of Housing Emergency; the passage of an inclusionary housing ordinance; \$55 million in new revenues for affordable housing; and the establishment of an "Affordable Housing Task Force."

- ✧ The group was a part of the ACCORD coalition (A Community Coalition for Responsible Development) which negotiated and finalized the first ever community benefits agreement in San Diego with the developers of the \$1.5 billion Ballpark Village.
- ✧ San Diego Organizing Project's "Call to Health" campaign resulted in increased funding for community clinics and streamlined application procedures for health care services. Project leaders collected over 10,000 signatures as a part of a coordinated statewide campaign to put an initiative on the November 2006 ballot to fund health coverage for all children.
- ✧ The organization is in the fourth year of working on the problems of youth in San Diego. Success has come in getting representatives of the city, county, and school board talking to each other and measurable results including:

All but one school in the pilot project improved academically over the course of the school year.

School truancy policies and procedures were evaluated and revised, with the assistance of the organizing project and the Probation Department. All district teachers and administrators were retrained on new truancy procedures and expectations on how to intervene with consistently truant students.

San Diego crime rates have decreased, including juvenile crime, with a consistent decrease in both the South Eastern and Mid City police divisions which include the pilot project area.

San Diego Organizing Project gets results on significant community issues. I'm proud to make my contribution. How about you?

Staff
Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube, Lead Minister
Rev. Kathleen Owens, Associate Minister
Elka Cartmell Ladd, 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, RE Assistant/ Adult Education Coordinator
Kenneth F. Herman, Director of Music
Suzette Southfox, Director of Community Life
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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Jan Garbosky, Immediate Past President
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Mark Helder, Eric Karpinski, Karen Santhanam

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