



FirstWords

A publication of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego

Social Justice Ministry Team Service Projects

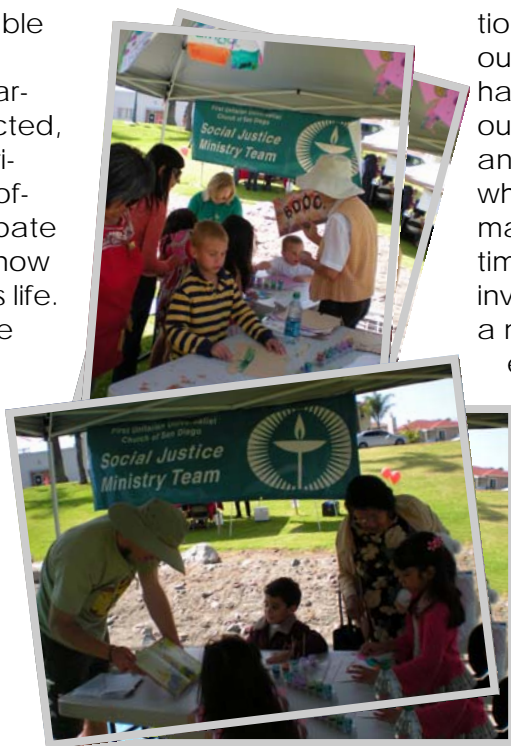
by Kristen Kuriga, Social Justice Ministry Team Coordinator

Each On a Saturday morning in January, thirty-seven members of our congregation went to the Feeding America Warehouse to sort food, check expiration dates, and pack boxes. At the end of the morning, the staff at Feeding America told us that our work had made an estimated 6,000 pounds of food available for distribution for families in need throughout San Diego County. A participant at the service project reflected, "I was strongly moved by the experience at Feeding America...I don't often have the opportunity to participate with other UUs in an activity that I know will make a difference in someone's life. It felt so good. I didn't sign up for the service project in order to feel good, I just wanted to support an organization whose mission I value. We UUs are at our best when we join together to put into action our shared spiritual values."

In every month since, members of our congregation have participated in monthly family-friendly service projects organized by the Social Justice Ministry Team. We have collected essential resources to be distributed to the homeless community through the UPTOWN Faith Service Center, participated in a beach clean-up with the Surf-rider Foundation, set up an interactive storytelling and art booth at the Day of the Child community Fair in Chula Vista, and worked at the San Diego Friends Center Peace Garden, which donates its harvest to homeless and refugee families. In June, we will be collaborating with the San Diego Food Bank for both our generosity offering, as well as our monthly service project.

Please check the window for more details. These monthly service projects are an opportunity for members of our congregation to live their values by helping to bring about the beloved community through service and action. Each month we partner with organizations that share our values through our generosity offerings, where we have the opportunity to be generous with our financial resources, and our monthly service projects, where we have the opportunity to make a difference through our time, energy, and participation. I invite you to consider joining us for a monthly service project. You can expect to have fun, get connected to community, and to do something concrete that makes a difference.

For more information about monthly service projects or how to get involved in the Social Justice Ministry Team, please contact Kristen Kuriga, Social Justice Ministry Team Coordinator, kristen@firstuusandiego.org, 619-298-9978, x8006.



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Arvid's Arcana

BY Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

Jefferson's Cheese and The Texas Textbook Controversy

On New Year's Day 1802, President Thomas Jefferson was standing at the door of the brand new presidential mansion in Washington D.C., dumbfounded by the sight before him. Horses on a dray were delivering a gift—a huge cheese, weighing 1,235 pounds, made from the milk of 900 cows. It was four feet in diameter and 17 inches high and written on the side were the words "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God."

Where did the cheese come from? From the Evangelical Christians of the day, whose hero Jefferson was. While a free thinker, the early 19th Century Evangelicals felt that Jefferson's passionate advocacy of religious freedom and the separation of church and state gave room for their faith and religion in general to flourish.

How ironic it is, then, that an Evangelical, Conservative majority on the Texas Board Of Education has ordered a new set of social studies texts that de-emphasize the whole idea of the separation of church and state. Jefferson's role is also given much less prominence in those new history texts. This is of concern because textbook publishers sell the same textbooks to other states and so these and other distortions of our history will become what millions of our children will be taught all over the country.

In the early 19th Century, the Unitarians of Massachusetts were on the other side of the debate. Until 1833, in the Bay State, Unitarian churches were part of the state's established religion, supported by taxes. Our spiritual ancestors fought hard to keep it that way. The Evangelicals and the Free Thinkers won. And now we must protect this freedom of belief from the very forces that fought so hard to grant it to us.

June 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.

The summer's **Transformational Theme** is
Joy and Ecstasy

June 6—Hillcrest

Multiple Levels of Joy

- Rev. Kathleen Owens

June 6—South Bay

Right View

The first in an occasional series of sermons inspired by the Buddhist path to spiritual liberation.

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

June 9—Vespers, Hillcrest

Creating Joy

For the final Vespers before her departure, Elka will draw on her experience leading youth and young adult worship to create an interactive, experiential worship space. Come with an open mind and an open heart, willing to try something a little different than a sermon sandwich. We will explore how we create joy and ecstasy in our lives and how we support each other in the creation of deep abiding happiness.

- Elka Cartmell Ladd, Intern Minister

June 13—Hillcrest

When Does The Good Stuff Happen?

Can Worship be Celebration? Even UU

Worship?

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

June 13—South Bay

Full Bodied Praise

- Elka Cartmell Ladd, Intern Minister

June 20—Hillcrest

Full Bodied Praise

- Elka Cartmell Ladd, Intern Minister

June 20—South Bay

When Does The Good Stuff Happen?

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

June 27—Hillcrest

The Road to Social Justice:

A Personal Journey

- Kristen Kuriga, Social Justice
Ministry Team Coordinator

June 27—South Bay

Multiple Levels of Joy

- Rev. Kathleen Owens

Join the Excitement!

BY Liz Jones, Director of Religious Education and Family Ministry

What could be more fun than spending an hour with a handful of wonderful children?

Being part of our Summer Children's Religious Education Program exploring our summer worship theme of Joy and Ecstasy!

Each Sunday this summer, our children will explore through story and activity what it means to be joyful, happy, fun-filled, and ecstatic. Each week we need at least four adults (two at each service) who want to share in the excitement and guide the children as they explore these ideas. General lesson plans are provided, and there will be lots of room for the adult guides to add their ideas to the sessions as well.

Sign-ups for these sessions now so you don't miss out! Call the RE Office or stop at the Children's Religious Education Ministry Team recruitment table on the patio on Sundays.

The summer program is an opportunity to sign up for a single Sunday and lets you spend some time with our children and explore what it is like to be part of a teaching team in our Children's program. Spending an

know that you are making a real difference in the lives of these children and in the life of this congregation

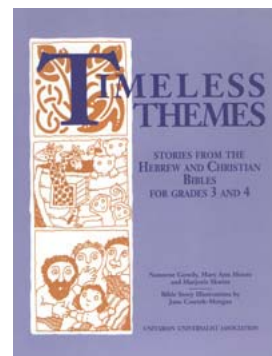
hour of exploring "Joy and Ecstasy" with our children is great, but the real excitement comes when you join one of our ten teaching teams for the regular church year program. The hour with the children is just part of it. You get to meet and know a whole new group of adults in our congregation, be part of a team that is working toward a goal, and know that you are making a real difference in the lives of these children and in the life of this congregation. What could be more fulfilling and rewarding!

Here's an overview of the program offerings for children that will begin in September:

✧ 5th & 6th Grades: We'll be using two new programs from the Unitarian Universalist Association. We'll begin the year with a program

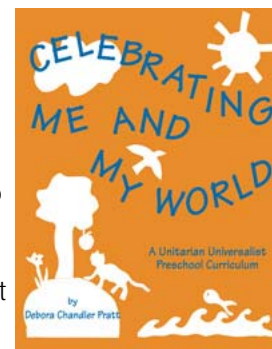
called Toolbox of Faith which uses a variety of tools as metaphors for the skills needed to be moral, just and faithful people. We'll follow that with Amazing Grace that explores Right and Wrong. How do we know what is right or wrong, what resources do we have for knowing, and how do we live our lives with that understanding?

✧ 3rd & 4th Grades: Have you ever wanted to explore or re-explore Bible Stories from a Unitarian Universalist perspective? What better way to do it than alongside eight and nine year olds. The stories we'll be exploring from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures are still alive in our culture because they deal with "Timeless Themes" like love, honor, jealousy, and faith.



✧ Both our 1st & 2nd Grades and our Pre-K/ Kindergarten classes use versions of a program called "Our Religious Journey" which explores the themes of Unitarian Universalist Identity, our Jewish and Christian Heritage, the Religions of the World, and Social Action at age appropriate levels for each group.

✧ Our 2's & 3's (two and three year-olds) will be spending their Sundays "Celebrating Me and My World." This is a program that allows these young children an opportunity to learn about themselves and the world around them. Short story and craft sessions are supplemented with lots of free play time.



Come be part of this exciting and dynamic program!

Blessings,
Liz

Pathway to Ministry

BY Wendy Bartel

"Wake, now, my senses of ministry clear. Brighten my pathway with radiance here. Mingle my calling with all who will share. Work towards a planet transformed by our care." ¹ The then new minister Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube was in the First Church pulpit. The congregation sang this hymn and when this verse began, I could not sing, for tears began to flow. For several years I resisted the call (and frequent nudging of many First Church members) to go to seminary, choosing instead to offer my gifts to *and* be blessed by this community. After a challenging interim transition, the congregation was ready for the next phase of ministry and it was (somewhat painfully) clear that it was time for me to take the pathway of formal ministry training.

What does it mean to be willing to sacrifice the comfort, familiarity, and love of home, friends, a business, and a church community, to answer a call to serve the larger world? And what is ministry?

The journey is unique to each of us; filled with awe and awful, with grace and grief, as well as love and loss. It is the stuff of life and also unlike anything else I've encountered. The Divine Spirit of Life and Love, which goes by many names, has made itself known in myriad ways throughout this often overwhelmingly arduous, sometimes heartbreakingly beautiful odyssey. It was a gift to be trusted by parents who asked me to conduct a child dedication for their newborn, for I believe that our lives are more meaningful with ritual. It was such an affirmation during my internship, to be asked to lead a process of creating a congregational covenant of right relationship, for re-

lationship (with all its complexity) is at the core of our existence. And I was personally blessed beyond measure to not only find a beloved partner, but to also have the legal opportunity to marry her!

Having had such strong models of shared ministry in San Diego, I feel incredibly fortunate to have found someone with whom to serve as co-ministers, for collaboration is an act of resistance to the unsustainable messages of force and power, so predominant in this culture. May we all find the courage to heal what is broken in us and between us.

Several folks indicated that they hoped my ordination would be at First Church and I was often overcome with waves of humility and gratitude. I can think of no better place for this rite of passage to happen, than the place that gave me many opportunities to develop and practice so many skills, to bear witness to life's unfolding, and to deepen my commitments to countering oppression and creating more justice and peace on the planet. As the ordination approaches (June 13, 5:31pm), I am again deeply humbled and grateful. Many, many thanks to the ordination committee, the church staff, and everyone else who has contributed to this journey to make this congregational celebration possible.

Salaam, shalom, amen, ashe, namaste, and blessed be!



Wendy Bartel

¹ Thomas J.S. Mikelson, words to "Wake, Now, My Senses," *Singing the Living Tradition*, 298.

Reflections on the Pilgrimage Partnership Tour

BY Kathy Smith

Why did I go half way around the world on our UU Pilgrimage Partnership Tour? To understand what people in the Philippines think, feel and believe in their version of UUism, as well as to offer my experience with nonviolence work in a community and prison setting.

On this partnership trip to the Philippines, I began to understand the strength of Reverend Rebecca Quemada Siennes, our President of the UU Church of the Philippines. Her father, Toribo Sabandija Quemada, was the founder of the UU Church of the Philippines. He was both a beacon and the founder of a home-grown version of Universalism, a broader faith grounded in the realities of rural people struggling for their own rights and way of life.

On May 23, 1988, the family home was set on fire. Shots were heard as the family fled. Her father died, leaving the fire. They eventually learned that her father had in fact been shot, not killed in that fire, as stated by the Government. This fire was a cover-up for his death, because he was a social activist for the rural poor. I experienced Rebecca as a strong woman who was a gifted, relational speaker in any setting – be it in a church service or with women's groups. envisioning projects or holding a space for youth development, along with the leadership of 28 congregations on Negros Island, and Bicutan in Manila.

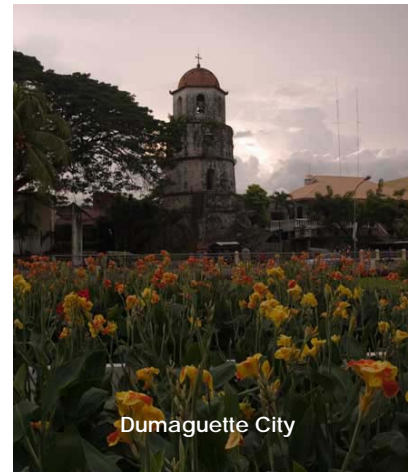
I was able to stay behind after our partnership journey and meet with the interfaith community based in Dumaguette City. There, I was able to share what I knew of studies in nonviolence; of the program that has been effective in our United States prisons and in international settings such as in the Great Lakes area of Africa where there has been so much violence. I talked about the Alternatives to Violence Project. Those in the Philippines were interested in that program and another movement, which their government is trying out -

the Restorative Justice movement.

I was so humbled by the offer of Dr. Sylvestre Alforque to translate my words into Cebuano as I was the speaker in the Open Forum section of a very spirited Convocation for 200 prisoners in the Dumaguette City jail. It turned out, that what we all did together was learn from each other, and to have a musical program. I have pictures of an amazing ukulele ensemble performance and copies of the program with a popular Christian hymn at the end. "Kasaysayan sa Kausaban". Though I never knew the English translation, I was told that Jesus was there in the wording. I could feel that whoever or whomever the Jesus of my understanding was there as well, as a balm for the troubled spirit. This reverence, this felt knowledge, is so rooted in community, and was echoed so many times on our trip to our partner churches along this journey. I received much more than I could ever give.

Thanks, Len and Carolyn, for encouraging me to go!

Peace,
Kathy



Unitarian Universalist Church of the
Philippines



New Church Database

BY Susan Reigel Harding

Dear Fellow Church Members and Friends:

I would like to tell you about a wonderful new project we'd like to begin: "Who Are We?" As your Church's membership chairperson, I am very excited about the ability of our Church's database to keep our members and friends better connected to one another.

We will be able to record all of our diverse family structures and relationships as well as your past and possible future activities at First Church. There have been so many times that we've wanted to be able to retrieve information about how people have participated in various activities and committees. All the information is in the archives and annual reports or most likely just in our memory banks, and if you're like me, that memory bank cannot always be called upon as easily these days and it takes too much of our precious time to search the archives and annual reports.

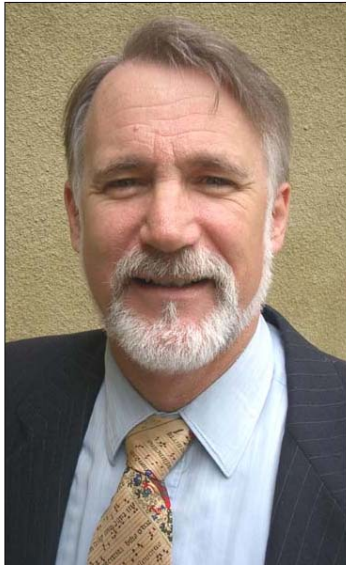
To this end, Corlee Morris, a member of our church, has volunteered to manage this project. She will be contacting you in the future with a questionnaire or just a phone call to start assembling the information you wish to provide on all the various activities, committees and groups in which you have participated or chaired here at First Church. We'll also be gathering something about the special talents and experiences you have developed over the years. We feel that it is important to know you all better, because there are lots of volunteer activities we'd like to undertake and we know there is a wealth of skills and abilities hidden within this beloved community.

By cooperating with and responding to Corlee's inquiries you will be aiding me as well as all the other Chairpersons, the Ministry Teams, the Board of Directors and the Ministers. The most important part of the project is for us not

to lose all the precious information of the past. Technology has come to First UU and let's use it for our becoming a real community. The information will be only that which you wish to provide and give your consent to use.

Sincerely yours,
Susan Riegel Harding
Membership Chair





Dan Ratelle
Adult Choir Director

How did you hear of First Church?

I had come to a few events and concerts at the Church, and I remember being impressed both by the grounds and by the vibrant conversations at a post-concert reception.

Some years later, after I had left my position as choir director at a small Christian church (interesting story there...), Ken Herman and I ended up in a choir together. We got to talking (after rehearsal, of course) and he mentioned that the Unitarian Church was in a search for a new choir director. Although I was a little leery of getting back into Church music, I remembered my earlier experiences at this Church, and decided to apply.

How have you evolved or been involved here?

Two big questions there. Although I did a little research on Unitarianism before working here, mostly I came in "blind." And for a good while, my ex-Catholic hippie self was suspicious. I found myself thinking that a place that honored thought, art, music, humor -- and diversity and safety for all of the above was simply too good to be true. But I was converted -- slowly. I soon became a supporting "Friend," 10 years later a member, and along the way I have seen my ideas about religion and worship change considerably.

For involvement, there are the family parts (Sharon and I were married here, had our children in RE here, and said farewell to our Mothers here) as well as bits of volunteering with the Youth and more with the Partner Church Committee.

An Interview with Dan Ratelle

By Robert McMahon

Did you ever consider leaving?

A couple of times, actually, though neither had to do with dissatisfaction on my part. Once, an accompanist I had worked with sought to recruit me to head a music program at one of the mid-size Protestant churches in the area. I found the idea of building a complete program appealing, and I did visit one of their Sunday worship services, but I found myself uncomfortable with the "us versus them" outlook. I was surprised to realize that it would have been a compromise of my UU principles to help in promulgating that world view.

What are your fondest memories?

Oh, there are many, but some highlights would include some of our rich Services of Music, such as a very moving Mozart Requiem and Carl Orff's Carmina Burana, hearing our Choir perform in Symphony Hall as part of an Interfaith music festival, bringing my several-day-old daughter to the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, hearing my son play a trombone sonata as part of a Service, thrilling to the sound of members of our Choir in the historic Black Church in Brassó, Romania, as part of our first Friendship tour, and so many more.

Do you have a philosophy by which you live?

In UU fashion, it's really more a set of principles...Leave things better for my having passed this way. Treat others well, and with respect. Expect and encourage the best in myself and others. Savor and appreciate beauty, friendship, love, laughter, and well, for the rest I suppose I could do worse than to quote Emerson, you know: "To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people, etc."

I think I too would call that success in life.

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
Kristen Kuriga, Social Justice Ministry Team 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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Sean Bohac, Newt Ferris, Scott GrantSmith, Mark Helders, Eric Karpinski, Karen Santhanam

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: oos@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://uusouthbay.org>

Webmaster: website@firstuusandiego.org

Care Network: carenetwork@firstuusandiego.org

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



FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF SAN DIEGO

4190 Front Street
 San Diego, CA 92103-2098

Phone: 619-298-9978

Fax: 619-298-9997

E-mail: mail@FirstUUSanDiego.org

Unitarian Cooperative Preschool Phone: 619-295-9860