



FirstWords

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The Almost Church Revitalized: Excerpts from the Introduction

by Michael Durall

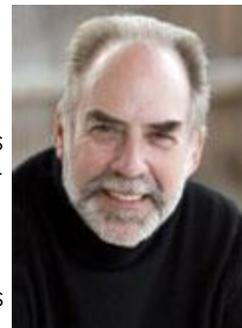
Back in the 1950s, most people went to church, at least on Sunday. Those who didn't felt they probably should. Most Americans held a positive view of the traditional church. Before the interstate highway system created a mobile American society, many churches presented a Norman Rockwell portrait, with three generations of families in the pews, wearing their Sunday best. That era is long gone.

Today, in church terms, the fastest-growing segment of the population is the un-churched. Only about two percent of congregations nationwide, of all faiths, have grown by five percent or more over the past few years. In Unitarian Universalism, this means fewer than 100 congregations have seen meaningful growth, while the remaining 950 have experienced membership plateaus or have gone into decline. I'm not being negative. I'm just the messenger.

Established churches today face two cultural groups of people. The first group, born before or about 1955, came of age in the disappearing world of the traditional respected church. The second group includes younger generations born into the emerging non-church world. If young people have an interest in religion at all, it's likely to be in a church of their same-age peers, or they view private spirituality as more appealing than the institutional church. And there's the rub. The methods used by established churches to reach younger generations fall on the deaf ears of those raised in an un-churched culture.

What's a congregation to do? If established churches adapt their methods to reach young people (for instance, contemporary music) this may cause distress among older generations. This is not to say that young people alone are Unitarian Universalism's salvation. But traditional churchgoers today live in a rapidly changing society that is in-

creasingly indifferent to religious expression. This altered environment calls for a far-reaching new perspective if Unitarian Universalism is to maintain its place on the American religious landscape. Time is not on our side, and gradualism will not do. Systemic change needs to occur in the very short term.

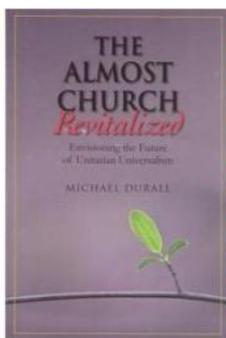


In this book, I make the case that many of Unitarian Universalism's most valued traditions are in actuality its greatest liabilities. UU churches build on many strengths. But a hopeful tomorrow will require discarding a sizable number of practices that have outlived their usefulness. This is a significant challenge.

But I also contend that countless alternatives exist. Many are extremely attractive and offer hope for the future. Throughout this book, we'll take a look at how UU congregations can evolve to meet the challenges of a new tomorrow...

My intention in writing this book is to help clergy, lay leaders, and people in the pews understand more fully the nature and character of their congregations. In doing so, I hope they will become more adventurous, mischievous, and successful in their roles.

Mike Durall is a well known church consultant and author. Among other books, he has written The Almost Church and The Almost Church Revitalized. He will be speaking at First Church on September 5, 2010.



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Arvid's Arcana

BY Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube

Transformational Themes For 2010-2011

The church is about to embark on its third year of a three year rotation for considering certain Transformational Themes, in worship, as Spiritual Friendship Group Topics, and in our Home Connections family study guide.

Here are the themes for 2010-2011:

September *Acceptance/Tolerance/Respect*

October *Creation*

November *Democracy*

December *God*

January *Authority*

February *Evil*

March *Spiritual Maturity*

April *Freedom*

May *Compassion*

Summer *Rest/Renewal/Sabbath*

Starting September 15, I will be taking two and one-half months of sabbatical leave in Mexico. Sonya will join me for part of the trip. You can follow my adventures on my "[Minister's Blog](#)" on our First Church website.

<http://www.firstusandiego.org/ministers-blog>

September Sermons

Celebration Times:

Hillcrest Campus:

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

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

September's **Transformational Theme** is
Acceptance/Tolerance/Respect

September 5—Hillcrest

Why Church is So Important

- Mike Durall, Pulpit Guest (live)

Surveys often indicate that churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike lead very similar lives. If so, what difference should Church make? This sermon might contain a bit of sage advice about the value of religion, a few challenges, and a heresy or two for a little added spice.

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September 5—South Bay

(Almost) Everything You've Wanted To Know About Meditation

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (live)

The final sermon in the series on the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path

September 12—Hillcrest

Unitarian Universalism: A Border Faith

- Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube (live)

Reflections on the history and future of our faith; we have always existed on physical and theological borders and that has shaped who we are.

September 12—South Bay

Why Church is So Important

- Mike Durall, Pulpit Guest (pre-recorded)

September 19—Hillcrest

The 5 W's of Our Covenant

- Rev. Kathleen Owens (live)

This month our transformational worship theme is Acceptance/Tolerance/Respect. This sermon will explore this theme in light of our Covenant of Good Relations.

September 19—South Bay

Unitarian Universalism: A Border Faith

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

September 26—Hillcrest

Joyfully Letting Down Our Walls

- Sue Magidson, Intern Minister (live)

What we can learn from the Jewish holiday of Sukkot during this time of transition.

September 26—South Bay

The 5 W's of Our Covenant

- Rev. Kathleen Owens (pre-recorded)



Religious Education Registration and Program Fees

BY Liz Jones, Director of Religious Education and Family Ministry

Preparation for the new Religious Education year starts with the new year's registration drive. We're often asked why we need to register our children every year. Why can't we just roll the registration over? It would be easier on all of us if we could do that, but unfortunately none of our lives or even our program remains the same every year. People move, change phone numbers and E-mails; decide to go to a different service, or even a different campus (we include South Bay in our registration as well.)

Our registration forms need to be up-to-date for several reasons. We need to know how to contact families, children and youth to let them know of special events, special programs, and to keep them updated on the curriculum. We also need to be sure that we know which class and service hour our children and youth plan to attend so that our class leaders and youth advisors can prepare, and so that we are sure to have adequate supplies on hand for the number of students we expect.

We also need the information parents supply concerning allergies and other medical issues for health and safety reasons. Such information helps us keep our children safe and healthy.

There is also a benefit to our children when parents register them for a particular class. When they come consistently to one particular service hour, they get to know the other children and make friends. Since most of our children do not have the opportunity to see each other on a regular basis outside of church, meeting with the same group of children each week will help them

feel comfortable and secure. If they have not made friends, and don't feel comfortable in their classroom, they are less likely to enjoy their experience and more likely to protest coming to church.

Last year we began a policy that if a child was not formally registered in the program after four weeks of attendance, they would be returned to their parents in the Meeting House until that registration was completed. This is necessary for their safety. Last year most parents easily complied with this.



Additionally, last year we began requesting that families either be fulfilling a financial pledge to the church or pay a program fee for our religious education program for children and youth. For those families not paying on a pledge, the fee requested is \$100 per child/youth per year with a family maximum of \$300. In order to be welcoming to new families, the fee is waived for the first year of participation in the program. If fees are a financial hardship for

any family, a one-year waiver can be requested from either of the Ministers or from me as the Director of Religious Education and Family Ministry. We know that our families value what they receive from our program, and that many of them came to the church particularly for the religious education program. Parents recognize that we need their financial help to keep providing a quality program for their children.

In expectation of a wonderful new church year,
Liz

VIVA: Values-Inspired Vacation Academy

BY Kristen Kuriga

A new initiative of the First Unitarian Universalist Church is taking shape in the South Bay. VIVA, the Values -Inspired Vacation Academy, is an innovative educational program that will provide low-income families with affordable child-care during school vacations. The program was inspired by the South Bay campus' commitment to social justice, and the desire to live our values in the community. The vacation academy is an exciting project because it meets a real need in our local community, will be based on curriculum that inspires reflection and service, and it allows the larger community to learn about Unitarian Universalist values.

All public elementary schools in Chula Vista are now on the same year-round schedule, which means that there are four vacation periods throughout the year. For working and low-income families, there is not enough affordable child care. The academy will operate during each of the vacation periods, starting next spring and will be open to children ages 9-12 throughout the district. There will be a focus on providing support to children affected by our broken immigration system, including children being raised by relatives because their parents have been de-



ported. The curriculum will include tutoring, character education, leadership development, and introduction to foreign languages and cultures, and will be shaped by the seven UU principles.

VIVA is a church-wide project of the Social Justice Ministry Team, and will provide opportunities to get involved in creating a meaningful experience for the children that attend the academy. Volunteer opportunities will include tutoring, administrative support, special event support, arts and crafts, physical education, and field trip supervision.

To find out more about VIVA, you can go to <http://www.viva-academy.org> We look forward to your involvement in this innovative project!

You can also contact Kristen Kuriga, Social Justice Ministry Team Coordinator, First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, Kristen@firstuusandiego.org or 619-298-9978, x8006 or Mar Cardenas, Mar@firstuusandiego.org .



Pride!



Arvid Straube



Everado Aguilar



First UU Banner



Eric Isaacson



Marriage Banner



Liz Jones & Mac MacDowell



Rainbow Drill Team



The UU Trolley



Standing on The Side of Love Banner



The 1,000 Family Rummage Sale is For Everyone!

BY Dave Hunt and Bonny Russell

On Saturday, September 18, 2010, First Church will have its last rummage sale for several years. Picture the church campus with thousands of donated articles neatly tucked into every usable space. Jewelry in Room 114 B, the Common Room transformed into a boutique, Bard Hall chock full of clothes for the whole family, collectibles in room 304; household in the lounge, and the entire lower patio overflowing with books, tool, gardening, furniture, pictures and pet items. Then add a couple hundred of UUs taking shifts starting at 6 a.m. as they assist the approximately 1,500 shoppers who will visit that day.

The rummage sale brings in over \$20,000 to the church, as well as many people who do not know about Unitarian Universalism. Each time First Church holds this sale, it attracts new members. People consistently tell us how friendly everyone is and how well the guests are treated. With everyone's help (and good weather!), this last rummage sale can be First Church's best ever. In an economy where people are trying to save, a rummage sale will do very well.

Susan Riegel Harding and Bonny Russell are once again leading the effort to organize the sale. Jan Garbosky is recruiting & organizing volunteers. Your help and gently-used items are needed for the sale.

What items can you donate? Maybe it's easier to say what we can't accept: computers, computer parts, printers, old monitors; very large items like appliances that are too much

for one person to move; clothing so old/tattered/dirty that you would be embarrassed to wear it to church or have another person handle. Anything else you would find at a rummage sale or swap meet is welcomed.

Donations are accepted at the Hillcrest church, Friday, September 10th through Wednesday, September 15th. Members and Friends in the South Bay who prefer not to drive all the way up to the Hillcrest campus can drop off donations at the South Bay campus on Sunday, September 12th.

There will be a truck and helpers available who can make limited pickups from your home if scheduled in advance. Contact Elsie Sleeter at 619-575-3191 or gor-donandelsie@cox.net. Please box or bag your items and label the contents. The boxes and bags will re-used on the day of the sale.



It will take an army of UUs to make it all happen, from area (department) leaders, to sorters, pricers, setup, and cleanup. The sale needs people who can help out at church the eight days leading up the sale, (September 10-17), as they accept, sort, price, and arrange the items for the Saturday sale. Sign up on the patio at church, on line at <http://www.firstuusandiego.org/rummage-sale> or contact Jan Garbosky to volunteer. And then, sign up for a shift on the 18th. Those who attend training and volunteer get to attend the special rummage pre-sale. Don't be on the sidelines! Yes, it is quite an effort to make this rummage sale a success, but it sure is fun for everyone who gets involved. You might just meet your new BFF.



An Interview with Shawn Jones and Sara Angell-Isom

BY Robert McMahan

SHAWN: I am a First Church member from birth (if that's even possible). My mom, Liz Jones is Director of Religious Education, and my father is Scott Jones, who has taught Pre K - K for 20 years. I started volunteering in the book room when I was around 10. I then started teaching R.E. in the pre K- K class with my father. The only time I was absent were the four years I went away to college. After college, I was brought onto the First Church staff and am currently the Special Events Coordinator and do general maintenance here and in South Bay.



as a vocal soloist for Sunday mornings and most recently with the choir.

Many people might not know that I actually got my start acting right here at First Church. I played a Coyote in American Mosaic back in 1994 and played Winthrop Paroo in Music Man in 1997. I performed in around 15 Looking Glass shows ending this year as Drake in Honk.



SARA: There are too many (memories) to name them all, but the ones that stand out are being a part of this community through Looking Glass, the Pre-School, Youth Group and Young Adults.

SARA: I started coming to First Church around the same time Shawn did, but I started at the pre-school. I also was in Looking Glass Theater from a young age and was a strong leader in the Youth Groups. I went away to college and when I came back I was elected to the Board of Trustees. I have been an advocate for the Young Adult Groups and just recently joined the Intern Committee. I am an avid member of the JUUL Tones, an a cappella singing group here at First Church, as well a member of the Looking Glass Theater.

I have cherished most the community of First Church

SHAWN: What I have cherished the most my entire life is the community of First Church. It has been amazing to have such a sup-



there are too many memories to name

portive group of people around me, asking what my next project is and thanking me for singing or just saying hi. I will miss each and every one of you and I do not think I will be able to replace the feeling that I get from just walking onto this campus and seeing so many caring and supportive people.

SHAWN: I graduated with a BA in Drama from the University of California in Irvine in 2008 and have been working (when I can) as an actor in San Diego. I love being onstage, but I am also a theatrical carpenter and have worked with companies building sets and working lighting. I love music and have played instruments most of my life. I have also been lucky to share my music with the church



SARA: I am going to enroll at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in September. I will be studying to become a minister in the UU faith. I hope to be able to serve this denomination with love, compassion, and joy!



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