First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego

FirstWords

October 2026 | Our Monthly Magazine | Vol. 20 No. 8

In This Issue

Your Lead Minister Search Team Needs Your Help! • A Vibrant New Church Year • Fall in San Diego • Documentary Screening: *Saving Walden's World* • *The Letter: A Message for Our World* by the Climate Justice Team & ICEJ • Author Discussion: Laila Ibrahim on *Scarlet Carnation* • Front Street Productions: Fall/Winter Season

Your Lead Minister Search Team Needs Your Help!

By the Ministerial Search Team

Thank you for filling out the congregational survey, which gave us some important information as we begin the search process. Now we want to explore some questions with you more deeply—questions about who we are as a congregation, what matters most to us, and what we're looking for in ministry. Knowing your thoughts, hopes, and dreams will help us find the right minister to serve this congregation along with Rev. Kristen.

We're examining these important questions in small group meetings called Congregational Conversations. This is an opportunity to hear and build on what others say, in order to deepen our understanding as a community. The conversations are being led by an experienced facilitator, with question prompts crafted by the search team. A member of the search team is also present at each meeting to take notes and help as needed.

If you've already been part of one of these Congregational Conversations—thank you! If not, please sign up for one meeting at whatever time is best for you using **this link**. If you have questions or need help, please contact **Leland Beck**.

Only Four Meeting Times Remain

- October 11: Hillcrest
- October 17: Zoom
- October 18: Hillcrest
- October 18: South Bay

Don't miss your chance to be part of this important step in our search process!

REGISTER HERE

Questions? Contact **Leland Beck**

Save the Date

Break Barriers, Build Beliefs Workshop

November 14, 2026 | 9:30 am - 2 pm

This workshop is part of the ministerial search process and will be presented by a UUA-trained facilitator. It is designed to help the congregation consider what biases it has (both conscious and unconscious) around identities our potential minister may have.

A Vibrant New Church Year

By Rev. Kristen Kuriga
Associate Minister

What an amazing start to the new church year! On Sunday, September 13, we gathered for our ingathering worship service. The space was filled with new and familiar faces, brimming with energy and anticipation.

The ingathering choir opened the service in beauty with a message of welcome. We honored the 25th anniversary of 9/11 through meditation and song. Then we offered our blessings for the church, weaving our heartfelt wishes into a collective prayer.

After the service, we hosted a neighborhood festival with music, face painting, dancing, magic, food trucks, costumes, and games. It was wonderful to see so many people staying after service to connect, play together, and find ways to get involved.

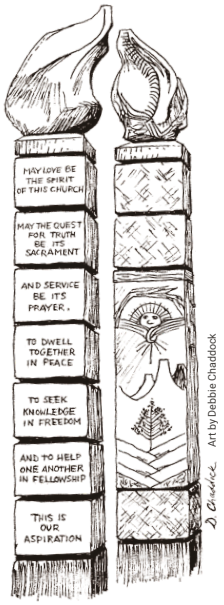
One of my favorite moments was encountering some of our children on the chancel in the meeting house playing church. One of them walked up to the mic and said, "In all of your uniqueness, you are welcome here." I thought, this is the power of church! What we are doing here matters!

The energy of ingathering took us into the community to live our values. On Tuesday, September 15, we showed up in solidarity with our Muslim neighbors at City Council to support a resolution on a working definition of Islamophobia and to call for an end to anti-Muslim hate in our city.

The next afternoon, we responded to an urgent call for action in City Heights to support immigrants and refugees being targeted by ICE outside of school gates and on college campuses. We joined with hundreds of community members to raise our voices, support one another through mutual aid, and to call on our elected officials to protect our communities.

On Saturday the 19th, Rev. Justine, BikeSD, and Councilmember Stephen Whitburn dedicated our new bike repair station in the church parking lot, affirming our public commitment to environmental justice and healthy communities. Meanwhile, our dedicated pantry volunteers distributed food to 550 families, as they do every Saturday. That afternoon, Front Street Productions hosted a wonderful concert featuring traditional Mexican music at the South Bay campus. The space was overflowing with more than 100 attendees as we enjoyed performances by La Rondalla and Mariachi Victoria.

As I reflect on this one week in the life of our church, I'm filled with enthusiasm and pride. We're truly living our mission to create community, nurture spiritual growth, and act on our values to help heal the world. This community is vibrant and thriving, and it's my great joy to serve as one of your ministers. May this new church year be blessed!



Rev. Kristen

Rev. Kristen Kuriga
Associate Minister, First UU San Diego

October Worship Schedule

Hillcrest Worship:
Sundays | 10 am | Meeting House
Hillcrest Patio & **Livestream** Worship

South Bay Worship:
Sundays | 2 pm | **St. John's Episcopal Church**

October's Worship Theme
"Courage"

October's worship theme is "Courage." As the days grow shorter and we enter a season when many things continue to feel increasingly uncertain, we pause to reflect on the many ways we might be courageous. What inspires you to hope when life feels heavy? In what ways have you been courageous, and how might you draw on those experiences to help yourself and others find courage now? Join us as we explore this month's theme and, perhaps, find some extra courage in one another.

Fall in San Diego

By Tony Bianca
Director of Spiritual Exploration and Worship Arts

Here in San Diego, fall sometimes feels to me like a made-up season. I wonder if it feels that way to you, too.

Growing up in South Baltimore, fall had a distinct rhythm. Labor Day weekend meant that nearly everyone I knew was cooking out in Latrobe Park, and the following Tuesday, literally every child I knew went back to school. The weather turned colder, winter clothes were unpacked, and the trees changed color and eventually shed their leaves. You knew fall had arrived because everything in the world around you told you so.

Halloween was also different as a kid. "What are you going to be for Halloween?" felt like a life-defining question. We mostly made rather than bought our costumes, and we roamed the neighborhood in Gen X packs, trick-or-treating up and down dozens of city blocks where everyone knew who we were and likely knew our parents and grandparents as well. The neighborhood's support of us as children was as obvious as the change in the seasons.

Now, as an adult living in San Diego, the patterns of fall are more subtle. It's been over a decade since I've been to a Labor Day cookout. Year-round school schedules mean that "back to school" is a season rather than a single day. I still enjoy seeing Halloween decorations and costumes, but the holiday feels more commercial and less communal. Without the dramatic change of

seasons, even the idea of "fall" can feel like we're just pretending. Sure, the days get shorter, and I eventually realize I haven't needed the AC, but the patterns aren't obvious. Fall still happens, but only if I'm paying closer attention.

I've realized that something similar has happened to both my spirituality and my sense of myself as a gay man.

There was a time when both my sexual orientation and my faith seemed to require declarations. I grew up Catholic, so spirituality came with obvious rituals, symbols, music, and particular ways of understanding the world. My spirituality was something you could see.

Coming out also had visible markers. First, I realized it myself; then I told people, discovered a community, and started living openly. I wanted people to know I was gay. It felt important, revolutionary, and more than a little dramatic.

As I've gotten older, both my spirituality and my orientation have become more integrated into my life. I don't need to announce either one quite as often because neither feels separate from the rest of me. Being gay and a Unitarian Universalist shapes how I understand love, family, community, justice, and belonging. Like a San Diego fall, both identities show up in less dramatic and more ordinary ways. There is something profoundly sacred about that ordinariness.

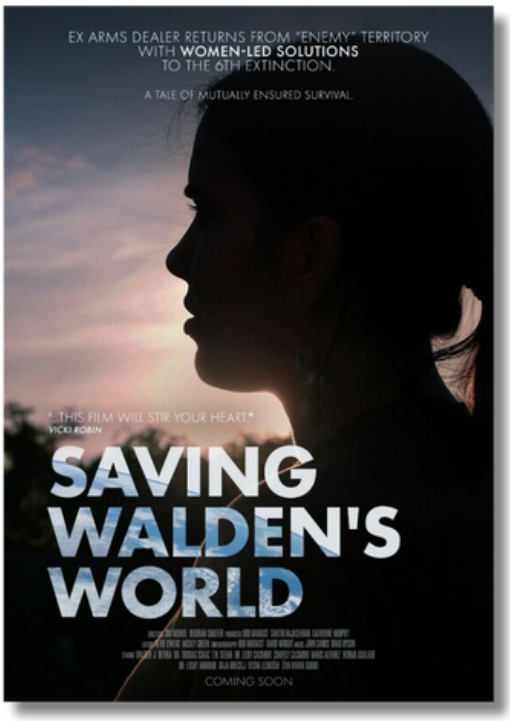
For generations, LGBTQ+ people were told that our lives were wrong, shameful, or something to hide, so there is something both beautiful and radical about living a wonderfully unremarkable gay life. In an increasingly politicized climate, when religion can sometimes feel like a tool used to judge and hate others, living a quietly spiritual life centered in love is one way we can bring peace to ourselves and our world.

While I still miss the dramatic patterns of the falls I experienced in childhood, I've also come to appreciate fall in San Diego. It reminds me that transformation doesn't need to be dramatic to be real. Subtlety, normalcy, and constancy can be beautiful, too, and the mundane can also be sacred.

Documentary Screening: *Saving Walden's World*

By the First UU Climate Justice Team

Join First UU's Climate Justice team and Activist San Diego for a special documentary screening of ***Saving Walden's World***, followed by a community gathering exploring sustainability, global equity, and social change.



When a young arms dealer realizes the devastating impact of his work on vulnerable communities, an ethical crisis sparks a lifelong quest for redemption. Saving Walden's World traces director Jim Merkel's journey as he raises his son, Walden, on an off-grid homestead and sets out to answer a vital question:

> *Could the very societies targeted by his former industry hold the key to a sustainable planet?*

The film travels to societies in Kerala (India), Cuba, and Slovenia, where powerful women are reshaping society to prioritize human well-being. Far from wealthy utopias, these regions offer access to free college education, universal healthcare, dental care, maternity leave, and childcare—essential services that remain out of reach for many in blue-collar America. In a world facing soaring global temperatures, *Saving Walden's World* offers an inspiring, practical vision for living sustainably on a finite planet.

Jim Merkel is an engineer, filmmaker, and environmental activist. His work on this documentary stems from his foundational book, *Radical Simplicity: Small Footprints on a Finite Earth*, and his previous film collaboration, *Radically Simple*.

Event Details

Date: Friday, October 2
Time: 6 pm - 8:30 pm
Location: Bard Hall, at First UU (**4190 Front St 92103**)
Co-Presenters: Activist San Diego & First UU's Climate Justice Team
Registration: Free and open to the public.
→ **Please reserve your spot here**. ←

The Letter: A Message for Our World

By First UU Climate Justice Team and the Interfaith Coalition for Earth Justice

The First UU Climate Justice Team and the Interfaith Coalition for Earth Justice invite you to a special community screening of the moving documentary *The Letter: A Message for Our World*.

The Letter: A Message for Our World is a powerful, thought-provoking documentary exploring the far-reaching effects of climate change, paths toward ecological solutions, and the strength of human resilience.

In the film, Pope Francis reaches across faiths, cultures, and continents by sending personal letters to grassroots leaders in Hawaii, India, Senegal, and the Amazon, inviting them to a summit at the Vatican. As these frontline activists come together to share their stories and search for solutions, the film brings a core truth into focus: *What affects one of us affects all of us*. Because climate change recognizes no boundaries, ecological action requires global unity.

The film was produced by Oscar-winning Off the Fence Productions and directed by Nicolas Brown in partnership with the **Laudato Si' Movement**.

In addition to Pope Francis, the film features environmental champions representing different faiths and worldviews from around the globe. Each brings a voice often unheard in conversations about the planetary crisis, including the voices of Indigenous people, young people, people experiencing poverty, and wildlife. Through deeply human interactions with Pope Francis and one another, they find new hope for the Earth.

The screening will take place at First UU's Hillcrest campus. Complimentary vegan snacks will be served. In the spirit of sustainability, please bring a reusable water bottle.
This event is free and open to all, but attendance is limited to 50 participants to allow space for thoughtful group conversation following the film. Early **registration** is strongly encouraged to secure your seat.

Photo credit: theletterfilm.org

Event Details

Date: Saturday, October 3

Time: 2 pm - 4 pm

Location: The Common Room at First UU (**4190 Front St 92103**)

Admission: Free & open to the public (Limited to 50 participants). **Reserve your spot here**.

Sponsors: Interfaith Coalition for Earth Justice (ICEJ) & First UU Climate Justice

Refreshments: Vegan snacks provided

Author Discussion: Laila Ibrahim on *Scarlet Carnation*

By Christy Anderson, *First UU Member*

Join the Laila Ibrahim Book Club for a special evening as we welcome author Laila Ibrahim for a live, interactive discussion on her acclaimed novel, Scarlet Carnation.

Set in 1915 in the San Francisco Bay Area against the backdrop of World War I, racial tension, and shifting social norms, *Scarlet Carnation* continues the sweeping intergenerational saga begun in Ibrahim's bestselling Yellow Crocus.

The story follows two extended family members, May and Naomi, whose grandmothers' lives were inextricably bound on a Virginia plantation before the Civil War:

May, a young white woman, sees her plans for a quiet future upended by an unexpected crisis, forcing her to forge a new path of independence.

Naomi, a Black nurse, mother, and community advocate, works tirelessly to secure homeownership and security for her family in the face of discriminatory housing practices.

Symbolized by the scarlet carnations worn to honor living mothers during wartime, the novel explores motherly love, systemic injustice, courage, and the powerful ties that keep families connected through generations.

Having the author join us live offers a unique, rare opportunity to dive deep into her writing process, historical research, character development, and the overarching themes of justice and resilience present across her novels. Whether you have read all of Ibrahim's works or are picking up Scarlet Carnation for the first time, all are welcome to attend and participate in the Q & A.

Event Details

Date: Thursday, October 29
Time: 6:30 pm - 8 pm
Location: Online and in Room 321 at First UU (**4190 Front St 92103**)
Special Guest: Author Laila Ibrahim
Contact: Reach out to **Louise Titlow** for full details and virtual attendance links.

Laila Ibrahim is the bestselling author of Yellow Crocus, Mustard Seed, Golden Poppies, Scarlet Carnation, Falling Wisteria, Paper Wife and After the Rain.. She spent much of her career as a preschool director, a birth doula, and a religious educator. She was born and raised in Whittier California, and studied Human Development at Mills College and San Francisco State University.

She's a devout Unitarian Universalist, determined to do her part to add a little more love and justice to our beautiful and painful world. She lives with her wonderful wife, Rinda, and two other families in a small cohousing community in Berkeley, California. Her young adult childrenand their families are her pride and joy.

Laila is blessed to be working half-time as a novelist. When she isn't writing, she likes to walk with friends and her toy Aussie, Hazel Nut, do jigsaw puzzles, play games, go to Disneyland, garden, travel, cook, and eat.

Front Street Productions

2026 Fall/Winter Free Community Events

TuYo Theatre presents "Our Lady of the San Diego Convention Center"
4 pm Saturday, October 3rd - First UU Church Hillcrest
Local theatre group presents a story about immigration, love, and hope.

Lesbians of San Diego: Coming Out Stories
1 pm Saturday, November 7th - First UU Church Hillcrest
1 pm social hour, 2 pm Staged Play Reading.

Navidad Latina - A Holiday Concert
7 pm Saturday, December 5th - First UU Church Hillcrest
Experience the holiday magic of Vox Artis and the Ghukasyan String Orchestra's soloists plus guest musicians.

Winter Schminter Solstice Concert
7 pm Saturday, December 19th - First UU Church Hillcrest
A folk music celebration of the winter solstice.

Front Street productions

Funded by the Outreach and Growth Fund

First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego
298 W Arbor Street San Diego, CA 92103

Free parking in our lot

Reserve your FREE seats at:
FrontStreetProductions.org

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Rev. Kristen Kuriga, *Associate Minister*
Rev. Everett Howe & Rev. Julie Forest, *Affiliate Community Ministers*
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Tony Bianca, *Director of Spiritual Exploration and Worship Arts*
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Andrea Spiero, *Comfort Choir Director*
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