



First
Unitarian Universalist
Church of San Diego

FirstWords

Our Monthly Magazine

November 2021; Vol 15 No. 9

Annual Pledge Drive 2022 / Back to Basics: Building Our Community

by Robie Evans and Pam Bates

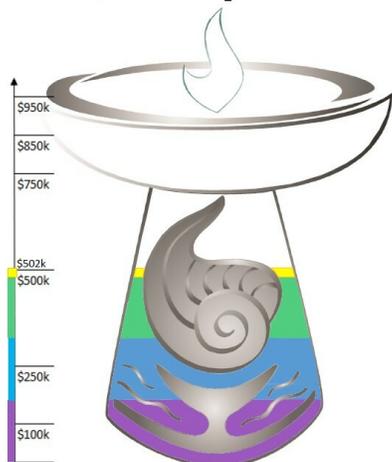
"The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away."

Pablo Picasso



We're now more than halfway through our five-week annual pledge drive. Out of 377 pledgers, 150 of you have made your pledge and we thank you heartily! Our goal is to reach total pledges of \$950,000 for calendar year 2022 and so far we've received \$502,276 in pledges, which is 53% of our goal. Again, we thank you!

Fuel the Flame!
Our Goal is:
\$950,000



the brain that results in a happy feeling ... I have observed

As our own Minister in Residence, Rev. Michael Brown, said in his recent sermon, "There is an enormous body of research that supports the idea that generosity is positively linked with happiness ... Why should generous people be more happy? ... some research suggests that acts of generosity trigger stimulation to a specific part of the

the phenomenon of Generosity in Unitarian Universalist churches over the last 40 years and in other settings as well. And it seems pretty consistent when we give to a cause greater than our own limited self-interests, it feels good. We like that feeling. There's something about being a part of something worthwhile beyond our limited individuality. We like being part of a community where we feel welcomed, engaged and committed to a higher purpose that expands our sense of self-worth and even expands our sense of self."

We are planning a very special Celebration Sunday on November 7th — both in-person and online! We've invited past First UU ministers to come and speak to us. We will have special guest musical artists, Chris Hassett and Drew Massicot performing throughout the service. And, there may even be a few surprises thrown in!

Please take a look at the Pledging page on our [website](#). You will see our colorful, engaging [brochure](#), full of First UU goodness; you will see a few videos from some of your friends about why why making a financial commitment and First UU are so important to them and you will be able to fill out your [pledge form](#) if you haven't done so already.

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Learning To Be Comfortable With Ambiguity

by Rev. Omega Burckhardt, *Assistant Minister*



Being comfortable with ambiguity doesn't come naturally for many of us. Most of us struggle when the way forward isn't known. Our human instinct wants us to avoid the discomfort of the unknown.

We seek companionship in the great spiritual journey of the unknown in our congregation, and yet there are so many changes, transitions, and hurts in our Sacred Community right now that some of us are feeling anxious. It feels ambiguous, this First

UU life of ours. Many of us have experienced harm. We want to know what will happen, and that we'll be a part of making it better. We experience grief at unmet expectations, and, in some cases, we may not feel very compassionate or able to hold grace for ourselves or others.

It's OK. It's normal to feel this way. Ambiguity in ministerial transitions is real. Hurt is real. The emotions you may be feeling about our First UU community are real and valid.

But, perhaps we can hold these feelings in balance with the possibility that change opens pathways to healing processes. There are some exciting ways in the month of November to engage with the Board in discussing the possibility of inviting a Developmental Minister to be part of the team in the coming year. There are opportunities to learn about and assist in creating worship in Hillcrest and South Bay in the next few months. Both Rev. Michael and I invite you to ask us questions about these changes if you have doubts or concerns, and we encourage you to participate in listening circles with other congregants to voice your feelings.

These moments of great transition offer us the space, interestingly, to delve deep into identity and congregational culture. We know there have been deep hurts recently, and we both are committed to working with our congregation and regional staff towards a healing process that supports the creation of congregational accountability practices that are just, equitable, and spiritually nourishing.

Rev. Omega Burckhardt

November Sermon Messages

Worship Time:

In Person Worship:

Sunday, 9:30 am, Hillcrest Campus

Live Streamed Worship: Sunday, 11:30 am
(ASL Interpretation)

<https://www.firstuusandiego.org/>

November's Transformational Theme is: "Community and Connection"

November 7, 2021

"Celebration Sunday"

Rev. Michael Brown & Rev. Omega Burckhardt
with the Annual Pledge Drive Team

November 14, 2021

"An Elephant on the Patio"

Rev. Michael Brown, *Minister in Residence*

November 21, 2021

"Transgender Day of Remembrance"

Rev. Omega Burckhardt, *Assistant Minister*

November 28, 2021

"Gratitude for a Life-Saving Community"

Rev. Michael Brown & Rev. Omega Burckhardt

Annual Pledge Drive 2022 *continued*

And remember, in addition to financial commitments, we also build community in many ways through our time and our talent. We each bring so many different gifts to our First UU community, and several pages of our website include opportunities to be even more involved.

At this time of year as we remember those who have gone before, we seek to continue the liberal and affirming congregation we've built here in San Diego since 1873. We're the ones who will hand this off to the next generation — a healthy, growing, vibrant Unitarian Universalist congregation which will endure for generations to come.

Transition, Return and Reinvention

by Tony Bianca, *Program Director*



It feels like stating the obvious to say we're in a period of transition! It's been a joy to welcome Rev. Michael and Rev. Omega; we're back to worshipping in person on Sundays as well as continuing to worship online; and, after quite a long time apart, Handbells are rehearsing in person and we're offering in-person children's and youth programming on Sundays. So, it's clear this is a period of transition, but that begs the question: What are we transitioning to?

I've said for quite some time now that this time apart, though tragic in many ways, is also a time when we've had an unprecedented opportunity to step away from what was "normal," and now have the ability to consciously and conscientiously choose what we want to become as we return. As much as this is a "return," it's also a "reinvention." With that in mind, here are some of the things we've planned and some of the ways you can participate and help.

Thanks to a generous donation by Paula Johnson, we now have a classroom set of ukuleles and will be launching a "Uke-Cafe" Program on Sunday, November 14. People of all ages are invited to join us on the Upper Patio after the 9:30 am Service as we learn to play the ukulele and strum along to both popular songs and songs from our hymnals. A few of our children have learned to play over

the past year and I hope they'll have the opportunity to expand their artistry, as well as have the chance to teach some of you what they've learned.

As I mentioned, we're once again offering Sunday RE classes. So far, we're all gathering as one, multi-aged group. But, as the number of children attending grows, we'll need to offer more groups, and we'll need adults to facilitate and assist those groups. If you're interested in leading a group or assisting simply by being a second adult in the room, contact tony@FirstUUSanDiego.org to volunteer. You can volunteer for as many or a few Sundays as you're able.



I'm also excited to continue the Musical Lecture Series I began offering during the pandemic. The next installment will take place on Wednesday, November 17, and it's my hope (weather permitting) this will be the first session I can offer both on Zoom and outdoors on our patio. All are welcome to join us as we explore a topic and watch great performances from movies, musicals, and operas outdoors on the big screen or from the comfort of your own home.

Finally, I'm excited to explore with you how we might offer new programming that meets the needs of our First UU community. If there's an idea you have about a program you'd like to offer or, perhaps, a way we might bring together different groups or programs that already exist, I'd love to hear about it. This is our chance to reinvent our programming and become whatever we want to be. I look forward to building that community with you!

Introducing our Assistant Minister, Rev. Omega Burckhardt

by Nancy Fisk, *Editor*

When Omega moved with her husband and children to Milwaukee in 2005, she finally found other people with her last name, but who spelled it many different ways. The name Burckhardt is of German derivation. Her parents met in St. Louis, married in Costa Rica, and she was raised between Southern Mexico and outside the St. Louis area.

She became fluent in Spanish from her extensive traveling with her parents. As an adult, she lived in Spain for a while. Omega has an MA and a PhD in Latin American Literature from the University of Kansas. She taught for 10 years at Marquette University, where she was the head of a program in Language Acquisition and Intercultural Competency. She communicated with students from all over the world through video conferencing.

Omega's parents were spiritual but not religious, rejecting formal religion. Her grandmother was the church organist and her grandfather the handyman for the local United Church of Christ congregation. As a teenager, she saw how their lives revolved around the church. She came to Unitarian Universalism looking for a spiritual home for her children. She and her husband first attended the Unitarian Society of Milwaukee, a large church with 600 members, where they quickly became involved in different aspects of the church.

What drew her to the church was seeing the local minister on the news at a justice protest. She was impressed that a religious leader was standing up for an issue publicly. The first service she attended was based on poetry. As a literature major, she enjoyed this. She had only been acquainted with Catholic communities before, after spending much time in Spanish speaking countries. It took some convincing to get her family to join, but her children grew up in the UU church, making friends and attending Our Whole Lives.

Omega attended the Midwest Leadership School, which was developed to train lay leaders. She was on

the staff of that school for three years and there discovered she wanted to focus on ministry. She left Marquette and attended seminary at Meadville Lombard. One of her part-time jobs during seminary was being employed at a craft brewery as their Spanish liaison.



Her ministerial internship was at two different places, Olympia Brown Unitarian Church in Racine and the Unitarian Universalist Church in Rockford. She feels First UU in San Diego is a good fit for her because of our long history of supporting diverse ministries, rooted in place and context. Also, she's very comfortable working with large congregations. She feels this position at First UU is a unique opportunity she's been training for her whole life.

Omega has a husband and two older children. Her husband is in Milwaukee with their three dogs and two cats. Her older son is at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Her younger son is at Scattergood Friends School in Iowa, a Quaker

boarding school.

She enjoys experiencing the sacred as a way to come together in community. She also saw early on that Unitarian Universalists fight for people's lives and justice, which she wanted to be a part of. She became a minister to hold spiritual space for people, and likes the embodied experience of the spiritual, which includes rituals.

In her spare time, she's a painter with acrylics and oils. In 2015, she hiked the Camino de Santiago, for two weeks and 250 miles.

Omega has been hired as the Assistant Minister to serve at First UU for the next two years. She'll be splitting her time between South Bay and the Hillcrest campus and looks forward to meeting all of us. We extend a warm welcome to the Reverend Omega Burckhardt-- ordained on October 31 by the UU Church of Rockford, Illinois. You can view the Ordination Service on [YouTube at UU Rockford](#).

Developmental Ministry - Notes from the Board

by Rev. Julie Forest, *Board President*

Last month I wrote to you sharing imagery of a bridge built from wisdom and trust right as one is walking on the bridge (*see article*). This month I'm using the seventh card of the Major Arcana of the Tarot deck. It's known as the Chariot. I'm using it in my meditations for energy and insight into how we as a congregation will move forward.



The card shows two beasts, often water oxen. One is pictured light and one dark. I find it useful to think of them as representing the polarities into which we so often live. It's imperative these two energies move in harmony otherwise the chariot, our congregation, will not move forward. In order for the chariot, (the congregation), to move forward, the energy needs to be coordinated and harnessed. And, someone

needs to hold the reins and steer the chariot. One of my personal goals as your president this year has been to get us to more stable ministry. A ministry that will last for four to seven years and provide the leadership we need to face our significant problems, challenges, and issues.

Do we remain in Hillcrest or do we sell the property? Significant repair costs are associated with this decision. How do we as a congregation committed to the 8th Principle, make our constitution, policies, and procedures more in tune with our commitment to anti-racism and anti-oppression? And we have heard repeatedly of the need for healing and repair and a new way forward for First UU in some of the areas that have caused the most division. Currently, we aren't financially sustainable and are understaffed. A Developmental Minister can help move us into better stewardship and help us figure out what it means to be a two-campus covenanted community.

This is the situation your board faces in November. In late September, I found out about the possibility of us qualifying for the opportunity to move into developmental ministry. As soon as I heard about it, I asked our regional support staff to present this information to the board at our October meeting. We were excited about what we heard and set times for us to share our learnings with you. We scheduled those meetings during the last week in October. You can see the recordings of those meetings on the website.



To help you compare our options:

- If we take the traditional route, we would have two years of interim ministry starting in August of 2022 and, hopefully, call a settled minister to start in August of 2024.
- If we're able to get a Developmental Minister, it will give us the stability we need NOW, not in three more years. A Developmental Minister would start working with us in August 2022 and stay with us, working on specific goals, for four to seven years. Part of our process with the Developmental Minister will include having them guide us through the 18 months needed to call a settled minister.

At a special Board meeting on November 2, at 6 pm, the Board will vote on whether to consider a Developmental Minister or begin the process for an interim minister.

<https://bit.ly/FirstUUBoardMeeting>
Meeting ID 923 8555 3480

Special
Board
Meeting

Camp de Benneville Pines News and Updates

October 2021 Press Release



2021 Art Camp

Yippee! Camp de Benneville Pines has reopened for eight weeks of Fall fun! Art Camp recently wrapped up with 28 happy campers, and volunteers have been up at camp working hard to make camp more firesafe by trimming tree limbs and picking up forest fuels off the ground. The number of participants at each camp will be held to half capacity. COVID safety practices have been implemented.

Everyone who attends Camp must be fully vaccinated against COVID. This is critical for the health and safety of all campers. All camp staff are vaccinated as well.

Camp will run on weekends only through Thanksgiving Camp, and then close December 2021 thru March 2022. Fingers are crossed for a springtime reopening (April/May) when youth and children have had ample time to get vaccinated.

Since the 2020 El Dorado Fire, camp has experienced mudflows off the mountain into the campus during heavy rains. Over \$80,000 has been spent to date to install barriers on the mountain side behind the Staff House, Craig's Cabin, and the Maintenance Building to slow down the water and mud that naturally wants to flow into camp.

Straw walls, silt catching fences, K rails, sandbags and mud traps have been installed. It will take a few years for plants and grasses to grow on the hillside above camp and retain the soils naturally. The camp is committed to camper safety and will need to cancel a retreat if a heavy rainstorm is expected on the mountain top.

[Read more](#) about Camp's 60th anniversary year and see how you can be a part of the legacy that is Camp de Benneville Pines—serving the 50 congregations of the Pacific Southwest Service Area since 1961.

To help sustain camp operations moving forward, the camp is raising \$350,000. A small group of camp supporters came together to create a matching challenge of \$175,000. Our lofty goal is to match this money by December 31, 2021. The good news is the camp has raised \$85,000 to date. This means \$90,000 to go! [Click here](#) to read more camp news and learn what has been happening at YOUR CAMP on the mountain top or [click here](#) to make a donation of any size.

To reach camp, please email Janet James at director@uucamp.org or call her directly on her cell phone 909-435-6298. Camp website: uucamp.org.



Food Pantry Seeks Gift Cards During Holidays

by Maureen McNair

The Alvarez family used to own a small retail business. Mom Sophia says, “We had a nice house, nice cars, everything comfortable. And, we lost everything. The store, gone. And with it, our savings, gone. The house, we can’t pay the mortgage. We sold one of the cars. We’re selling my jewelry.”

Sophia says she never thought her family would use a food pantry. But, she’s grateful for it. “I think things will get better. We’re healthy, and our family is okay. This place is a blessing.”

Arturo first visited the pantry last June. About six weeks later, he said his sister, brother-in-law, and their three children moved in with him to save on rent. Arturo wanted to know if he could get a little extra food.

Elaine is over 70 years old. She still works several days a week and relies on our food pantry every week to feed herself and extended family. She gives me a hug of gratitude whenever she sees me.

On the Saturday before last Thanksgiving, our South Bay Food Pantry provided food for over 190 families. We had 20 turkeys to give them. This year, there’s a turkey shortage. So, we anticipate securing even fewer turkeys for our food distributions before Thanksgiving and Christmas. And, just to complicate matters, Christmas happens to fall on a Saturday, our regular distribution day this year. So, the pantry will be closed and won’t be putting as much food into the community as we usually do.

The food pantry volunteers would like to give these families and many more a holiday turkey. But, it doesn’t look like that will happen much this year. Feeding San Diego, the region’s largest food

bank, has no turkeys at all. The other regional food bank, the San Diego Food Bank, has over 12,000 requests already. We’ll be lucky if we’re allowed to buy 10 of them.

That’s where you come in!

The food pantry volunteers would like to give our neediest households a gift card to a grocery store near our pantry so each family can buy their own turkey.

If you’d like to donate a turkey gift certificate, we’re suggesting a \$25 designated donation. Please just follow this link firstuusandiego.org/donations.html



and note the donation is for a Food Pantry gift card. Or, you may mail a check made payable to FUUSD. Please write Food Pantry gift card on the memo line. Please mail checks to Robie Evans, First UU Church of San Diego, 4190 Front St., San Diego, CA 92103.

Our volunteers will use your donations to purchase gift cards at the grocery stores nearest our South Bay Food Pantry. (Some grocery stores which appear to be chains, such as Sprouts, are actually individually owned. That’s why we prefer to purchase the gift cards ourselves, so the cards are usable at the stores nearest our pantry.)

Addressing food insecurity is a grass roots social justice issue putting our congregation at the front of activism in south Chula Vista. We all thank you for your continued generosity. I look forward to sharing stories with you about the gift card distribution you make possible!

Thank you to pantry volunteer, Bella Furth, who regularly does client intake, for sharing some of these stories.

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