



First
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FirstWords

Our Monthly Magazine

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Discussing the UUA's Commission on Institutional Change (COIC) Report

By Rev. Kathleen Owens, *Lead Minister*

September's worship theme was Change and the Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA) Commission on Institutional Change report is an important reflection on various changes that must be made, if the UUA is going to live its values into practice.

At the June 2017 General Assembly (GA), after the resignation of then UUA President Peter Morales and due to the entrenched hiring practices and harm created by the UUA, a Commission on Institutional Change was "established and charged by the UUA Board of Trustees to conduct an audit of white privilege and the structure of power within Unitarian Universalism, and to analyze structural racism and white supremacy culture within the UUA."

The Commission worked for three years interviewing and listening to people's experiences within the UUA examining the current practices that have maintained the status quo. At the General Assembly in June of this year, the Commission

presented its report, *Widening the Circle of Concern: Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change*.

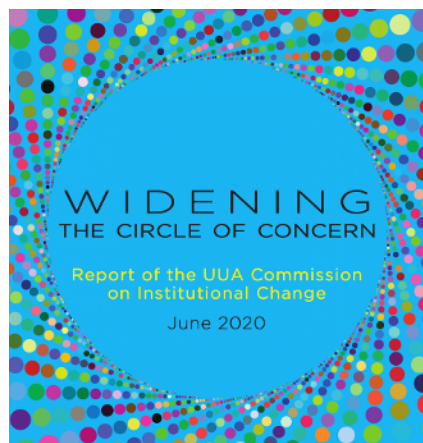
This report is divided into ten different sections, covering a wide range of topics that reflect the larger UUA and can be applied to local congregations —

topics such as Theology, Governance, Congregations and Communities, Hospitality, Educating for Liberation, Living our Values in the World, Restoration and Reparations, and Accountability and Resources.

It includes analysis of each topic and offers various recommendations, action steps, and take-aways. A variety of ministry teams, leadership groups, and individuals in our congregation are reading this report to see how it might help us become a more anti-racist, anti-oppression, and inclusive congregation. You can read or listen to it here: <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic/widening>.

Kathleen will be hosting two discussions for all who are reading the COIC report. The first discussion is Saturday, November 14th at 1:00 pm and will be a check-in about what is speaking to you from the report. You don't need to have finished it to participate in this discussion.

The second discussion is Saturday, March 27th at 1:00 pm. It's hoped everyone in this discussion has finished the report by then, as the discussion will focus on the changes we want and need to make in our congregation. Change is an opportunity to grow and this report offers us a faith-based path.



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Reparations

By Rev. Kathleen Owens, *Lead Minister*



The fall is a favorite season of mine. I enjoy the changes fall brings: cooler weather, the turning of leaves, and the food of the season. This month will also bring the opportunity to practice living our values and principles, to learn about ballot initiatives and engage deeply in important questions about who we want to be and what direction we want our country to move in as we approach the November election.

Our monthly worship theme of Reparations is timely. This topic is both straight forward and complex. This topic brings up all kinds of emotions and there's a lot to learn together. For me, one of the biggest values tied to the theme of Reparations is truth-telling—recognizing the fuller story of our country's history and how it continues to play out in our lives today. This theme asks us important questions that affect our future. I recommend this article for you to read:

<https://medium.com/@davidemills77/floyds-america-introduction-the-post-slavery-state-homicide-and-the-new-case-for-reparations-903edf3bd68c>

With this worship theme, our congregation will be joining the multitude of conversations happening on the subject of Reparations—because we are a congregation that's relevant, that's current, that wants to learn and grow together. You can also find a chapter on Reparations in the UUA's Commission on Institutional Change's (COIC's) report *Widening the Circle of Concern*.

This month will also see us having more variety in our worship services. On October 4, we'll be joining other UU congregations experiencing the worship service put together by our national UU the Vote team. Regardless of how you may feel about the upcoming election, our voices and action make a difference and there's still a lot of work for us to do.

October 11 sees us recognizing and celebrating Indigenous People's Day. On October 18, the San Diego UU Cluster will have a shared worship service. We're excited about this service and hope for other shared opportunities in the future. The month closes with our Earth Centered Spirituality Circle leading worship on October 25.

We're in for a rich, meaningful, and important conversations and worship experiences this month. I hope you'll join in, however you can, as we open our hearts and minds and with curiosity and humility learn and grow together.

Faithfully yours,

Rev. Kathleen

October Sermon Messages

Worship Time:

Live Streamed Worship:

Sunday, 9:30 am

(Bilingual & ASL Interpretation)

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

October's Transformational Theme is: "Reparations"

October 4, 2020

"UU the Vote"

Rev. Tania Y Márquez

Assistant Minister

October 11, 2020

"The Time Has Come"

Rev. Kathleen Owens
and Jennifer Clay

October 18, 2020

San Diego UU Cluster Worship

Shared Worship Service

October 25, 2020

"Many Paths to the Ancestors"

Earth Centered Spirituality Circle

On the Bright Side

by Tony Bianca, *Program Coordinator*

It would be a huge understatement to say there have been challenges this year around planning and implementing a Religious Education Program. Many of our program's biggest assets—amazing classroom spaces, dedicated teaching volunteers who can be present for our children on a weekly basis, well-organized curricula designed for specific age groups, and a supply room that rivals the best craft store in town—are not easily utilized in this new, Zoom-based reality. Despite the challenges, however, we've found ways to adapt and, in some cases, offer some new and exciting options for our youngest members. I'd like to take this opportunity to share a few of the "silver linings" I've noticed in these cloudy times.

Our Youth Programming is thriving. Without the transportation barriers that can sometimes inhibit participation, the youth are meeting more frequently than before. Käthe Larick, our youth programs coordinator, and our youth advisors host digital movie nights, virtual game nights, and Sunday morning topic discussions for the senior high youth, while the middle school youth meet on Sundays to explore our UU principles and values and monthly worship themes and have deep conversations. We've created a virtual space where our youth can continue to gather for fun, support, and a much-needed sense of community.

As a new addition to our RE Programming, we're offering 1-on-1 Zoom meetings for children and youth where they can spend a half hour with me focused on their individual needs or areas of interest. Some children are using this time to get homework help and tutoring as they navigate the challenges of online learning.

We've loaned out three ukuleles so our children can use this time to have private music lessons and learn a new instrument. Still others are using this time as a check-in where they can process what's going on in their lives.



We've also continued to offer two weekly group sessions on Saturday and Sunday where children hear stories and have discussion centered on our values and principles. Though these sessions have seen fewer children attending than when we met in person on Sundays, the smaller class sizes have allowed us to focus on topics that interest the individual children who attend. We've learned magic, studied the lives of Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Thurgood Marshall, and even had a story about space travel read to us from an astronaut aboard the International Space Station!

As we continue to grapple with this new way of being together virtually, there is, to be sure, much work yet to be done around how we might best meet the needs of families, children, and youth in these challenging times. But I'm also both grateful and hopeful as I continue each week to witness the resilience and dedication shown by our families, children, and staff as we navigate these challenging times together.

Fighting Hunger and Climate Change Together

by Maureen McNair

Recently, during the same week, two adults visiting our South Bay Food Pantry told me they had not eaten in three days and I received an offer for 11,000 pounds of free apples. We all understand that people in our community go without food because they don't have the money to buy it. And, we know that many more than two people in our region went hungry that particular week.

The produce wholesaler offered me the apples for free, if I would take them all. The transportation was our responsibility. The apples were harvested in Washington State and transported in a refrigerated semi-truck to the produce wholesaler's warehouse near the San Ysidro border crossing. But, the wholesaler couldn't find buyers for the apples. They were perishable and took up valuable warehouse space.

If he didn't give away the apples, the company would have to pay the costs to transport the food to a landfill and pay the fee to use the landfill. That was more cash out of the business' pocket toward an investment that had already lost money. So, it made financial sense for the produce wholesaler to make a tax-deductible gift of the 11,000 pounds of apples.



Activists in the food insecurity community applaud this arrangement to some extent. So do climate change activists. Food waste contributes measurable amounts of greenhouse gases to Earth's atmosphere. Keeping food out of landfills prevents those gases from escaping into our atmosphere and gives the food back to the community. A number of recent laws in California are

designed to address this problem. Distributing what would become wasted food to the community is advantageous all around. But, we aren't there yet.

Even though a mutually beneficial relationship exists to some extent between area food pantries and some produce wholesalers, the disconnect I experienced between people who need food and the amount of food available but not distributed in our communities, is a great example of the dysfunction in our food distribution system. San Diego County is actively trying to change our food system to be healthier and more sustainable.

The San Diego Food Alliance System is a coalition of various government and community based organizations who are researching, engaging the community, and revisioning our region's entire food system from production through distribution. Their project, San Diego Food Vision 2030, is designed to "elevate social, environmental, and economic equity for all." Alliance members include the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency and Land Use and Environment Group; the University of California, San Diego Scripps Institute of Oceanography, and the UCSD Center for Community Health; and, many other groups ranging from the Pala Tribe to local food activist groups. They are also partners with 13 cities, from Chula Vista to Vista.

SD Vision 2030 has completed its research phase. Through October and November, the group is collecting visions, goals, and strategies. If you'd like to participate, please go to <https://www.sdfsa.org/vision>. The Alliance aims to issue its final report in December.

So, what happened to the apples? I turned down the initial offer because our South Bay Food Pantry doesn't have the trucking or storage to handle 11,000 pounds of apples. I asked the warehouse manager for some time while I called other pantries, split up the load, and accepted about 1,200 pounds of apples. A few weeks later, our pantry received a nice bonus—one of the pantries I alerted to the apple bounty gifted our pantry with their overflow of about 900 pounds of cabbages and pears.

This particular transaction ended up working out. But, really, isn't there an easier way to address the social, environmental, and economic issues facing us today?

Centering Dismantling Racism: How We Got Here and Why We'll Continue

by Jan Garbosky

Have you heard, said, or thought:

- “Why do we have to keep hearing about racism?” or
- “Why in our service do I have to hear both English and Spanish?” or
- “Why do I hear public apologies during services about things that are no big deal?”

As UUs, we often refer to our covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Yet—just as often, we harm, in words and deeds (intended and not), those among us who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). Many were surprised to learn this in the Summer 2018 Town Hall meeting where BIPOC shared the pain of their experiences at First UU and presented a document whose introduction states:

“... [A] constant that remains ... is the desire to see the integrity of this community blossom to its fullest potential. Many of us have been wounded too many times for words but continue to meet at the table of our values ... We do not always feel the welcome we desire, but we see intent. And to avoid the continuation of another road to nowhere paved with good intentions, we seek to offer our guidance with a platform of appeals.”

In brief, the platform included four specific requests:

- Adopting the 8th Principle by 2020 as an intentional approach to understanding our community's white supremacy and what adopting it means for non-BIPOC membership. (This will be a focus of the Board's work this year.)
- Implementing a comprehensive 3-year plan for leadership, worship, and program realignment by increasing diversity in staff, musical expression, message delivery, performances, and actively reviewing/revising and creating policies and

practices to better reflect the demographics of the city of San Diego (60% BIPOC/40% non-BIPOC).

- Reviewing staff employment policies and agreements, recruitment and hiring practices, and salaries.
- Utilizing the JTW Core Team structure, with membership reflecting San Diego's demographics, for policy creation and changes to ensure equity becomes First UU's new standard of practice.

“We understand our petitions will be difficult to achieve, but we also believe this community doesn't understand just how difficult it is for many of us to participate in and relate to our Hillcrest campus ... [U]nfortunately, the culture making BIPOC members, staff, and friends uncomfortable and even fearful to voice an opinion has continued here ... rather than ... a community striving to make space to become a place of diverse expressions and identities. Despite all this we wish to remain at the table ... and help aim its growth, lest it forget the margins where many of us stand. We believe you should emphatically invite this courage we bring here to you.”

Please watch Rev. Katheen's December 16, 2018 message, *The Hope Made Real*, where she explains why First UU has intentionally chosen to center anti-racism/anti-oppression/dismantling systemic racism in everything and that all we do will be examined through that lens. In alignment with our UU values and because of the truths shared at the Town Hall, we examine, reflect upon, make change, accept accountability for what we do and don't do when we fall short of our aspirations, apologize, and make reparations. This is the spiritual work we are called to do individually and as an institution to make real the hope of ending harm to our BIPOC siblings and becoming radically inclusive to all.

Why A Place?

by Everett Eastman, *from a service given on August 16, 2020 "Once Upon a Pandemic"*

What drove me, scheduling a bouncing day of hospital, clinic, back again? Do As Much As I Can In One Day sometimes rings hollow in the CE, the Covid Era, new normal, pandemic. Bender of human ties, you have many names. Gazing at Our First Lot, familiar, lonely in being filled by not us. I parked early morning, donation to the church, to us, I think.

Into the hospital. Processed, sanitized, checked-in, badged, sanitized, find the way, don't touch—oops, sanitized, wandered, don't touch—oops. Sanitized, checked-in, wait and wait, brought back, sanitized. Checked in, informed, injected, informed, instructed, sanitized, released, find the way, don't touch—oops, sanitized, walked out. Repeat again, hours later. It gets old for all of us.

Tired of the grind, wanting respite. Staring at our buildings. Gates closed. Remembered the openness at the end of the lane. Slowly, deliberately walked toward the canyon, toward the tree, toward the window.

See the fullness, and shade, and paned glass. Feeling grateful for the planters and builders whose names I'd forgotten. Turned to see the fountain and rocks, dry and silent. Should I sit? Leftward looking to empty buildings, walkways, stairs, plants, and a river of rock. Should I walk? Should I be here?



Sound of the bell calling me to community. Empty of bodies, echoing with voices. Words and names on walls. Ancestors, my community today, waiting for those who may find a home on this hill, near the sea. Or somewhere. Many somewheres.

Empty chalkboard, children have written and drawn on, have performed in front of. A patio of tables and chairs stored

away waiting for another day. Another year? A meeting hall. Low entry leading to vaulted spaces containing high hopes, shattered hopes. Ah, my spot in the sweeping hall, remembered faces so strongly missed, of strangers turned friends and compatriots. Quiet fountain that once accepted my tears in sacred communion with a deeply listening Sensei most Reverend. I sit. And I sit. And I sit.

Rested between rushing and sanitizing. Recalling why this place. And why any place. They are vessels of finding and leaving and returning, or not. Communing. Remembering joy and grief. Giving and receiving and emptiness. Finding and taking in. Giving back for the as yet unknown ancestors whose faces I will never know. On this speck of Blue Boat Home.

Everett has spiritually been a UU for a very long time, but didn't know it until he joined First Church nearly 4 years ago.

Late Summer, 2020

by Jenner Daelyn, from August 16, 2020 service "Once Upon a Pandemic"

Maybe there is a ghost of the year that
would have been
haunting this one
running parallel
an alternate universe
alien, but familiar
a shimmer on the horizon
near enough that in the nighttime quiet
we can hear the lives we should be
living
echoes in the next room
in a house that we know is empty

Time doesn't work well here in this year
not anymore
(time never works well in a nightmare)
days blur together
formless and sagging
and in the blurring of time
we can see snippets
of what this year could have been
a curtain blowing gently
when there isn't any wind

Maybe, in the ghost year, the world
As we know it
hasn't ended yet
maybe the people in that year

still have the "old normal"
maybe they can still
gather, sing, hug,
talk, travel, worship,
shake hands,
go to school,
have brunch,
celebrate weddings,
and mourn together at funerals,
without risking
...everything

In that year, maybe
hundreds of thousands of people
are alive
while they're dead in this one.
Maybe there, their graves remain
undug.
Maybe there, the living are unhaunted.
And in that ghost year,
maybe a version of me exists,
and maybe the grief I've carried since
March,
like a cold and heavy stone in my heart,
doesn't.

Jenner Daelyn finds inspiration for her art and poetry in liminal spaces – physical, emotional, and spiritual – looking for meaning by exploring the in-betweens.

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