

# **Report by the Associate Minister Call Discernment Team on the Congregational Conversations**

## **First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego December 31, 2025**

### **PURPOSE AND PROCESS OVERVIEW**

The appointed members of the Call Discernment Team have been charged with planning and conducting a process that will determine whether Assistant Minister Rev. Kristen Kuriga should be called to serve as the settled associate minister for First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego. We are pleased to submit this report to the Board of Trustees and Revs. Justine Sullivan and Kristen Kuriga.

With the goal of generating the greatest degree of congregational participation possible, the team planned and facilitated small gatherings at Hillcrest, South Bay, and via Zoom. 16 sessions were originally planned. Our anonymized notes on the 10 sessions actually offered are included in the full version of this report. These gatherings were convened from November 9 through December 7, 2025. 88 congregants participated and contributed their thoughts. Team members served as the recorders (second facilitators) for each session, with other members of the congregation serving as the primary facilitators.

The cancelled sessions include four concurrent sessions at Hillcrest because one session proved adequate in each case. The team also cancelled the last two sessions, at Hillcrest and South Bay, because there were no individuals signed up for those dates.

Facilitators were asked to follow a facilitation guide in their conduct of each congregational conversation. The guide is included in the full version of this report.

At the heart of the guide were these three questions:

1. For you personally, what does the Associate Ministry of your hopes and dreams look like?
2. How does our current Ministry compare to the Ministry of your hopes and dreams? (Might want to consider both similarities and differences)
3. With all we have shared, do you believe Rev. Kristen's ministry is a good fit for our community going forward? (For in person meetings, participants will have the option of answering this question privately on paper and turning it in to the facilitator)

Congregants were asked to respond to questions 1 and 2 in the first round, with a subsequent round for question 3. Congregants were finally asked if there was anything else they would like to share on this topic.

Congregants at all sessions who might be uncomfortable speaking were offered the opportunity to submit their thoughts confidentially in writing. None took advantage of this option. Congregants who could not attend a congregational conversation were offered the opportunity to submit their responses via email.

**There was unanimous support for calling Rev. Kristen. The team therefore strongly recommends to the Board of Trustees that it approve a vote by members of the congregation regarding this opportunity following the regular Hillcrest service on February 8, 2026.**

## **SUMMARY REPORT**

This summary based on the congregational conversation minutes has been AI-generated by Anthropic's Claude, and was reviewed and edited by the team.

**100% of participants across all sessions expressed support for calling Rev. Kristen as the settled Associate Minister.** The support is enthusiastic, unanimous, and unequivocal.

### **Key Themes and Strengths**

#### **Social Justice Leadership**

- Exceptional commitment to social justice work, including the Food Pantry, immigration support, and community organizing
- Strong background as former Social Justice Coordinator and union organizer
- Active presence at protests and in the broader South Bay community
- Described as passionate, persistent, and effective in getting things done

#### **Pastoral Care and Interpersonal Skills**

- Warm, welcoming, caring, and compassionate presence
- Excellent listener who is accessible and approachable
- Strong at creating boundaries while being genuinely empathetic
- Described as having "black belt" level pastoral care skills by some, though others noted desire for more pastoral care availability

#### **Spiritual Depth and Practice**

- Her deep Buddhist and meditation background from Zen monastery training is appreciated
- Brings diverse spiritual practices into services
- Calm, centered, serene presence described as "unflappable"
- Guided meditations highly valued by congregants

#### **Leadership and Organizational Skills**

- Highly organized, prepared, and effective
- Strong problem-solving abilities and quick situational analysis
- Successfully managed South Bay campus relocation to St. John's
- Demonstrates flexibility and ability to work collaboratively
- Excellent at delegation and mentoring (noted with Valeria)

#### **Communication and Preaching**

- Powerful, thoughtful, well-researched sermons
- Clear, logical delivery with practical life applications
- Speaks from the heart with authenticity and genuineness
- Bilingual (Spanish) - seen as important asset
- Compelling online presence

#### **Relationship with Lead Minister**

- Works exceptionally well with Justine in complementary partnership
- Flexible and supportive team player
- Together they create a "super minister" effect
- Will be valuable in search for new Lead Minister
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#### **Connection to Young People and Families**

- Young minister with young child - important for attracting families
- Relatable to youth and young adults
- Uses dance, music, and contemporary approaches
- Seen as able to "bridge eras" between older and newer members

#### **Institutional Knowledge and Continuity**

- Deep understanding of both Hillcrest and South Bay communities
- Has been with congregation through various roles over many years
- Provides crucial stability during leadership transition
- "Home" is with this congregation - wants to stay long-term

#### **Additional Observations**

##### **Process Benefits**

- Participants appreciated the "listening circles" as community-building opportunities
- Value in bringing congregation together for these conversations

##### **Future Considerations**

- Several noted that calling Kristen will help attract a strong Lead Minister
- Recognition that she will provide stability and prevent mistakes in Lead Minister search
- Desire for intern minister program to return to help with workload

##### **Personal Qualities Highlighted**

- Humble, lacks ego, graceful
- Sense of humor and brings joy
- Strong, tough, fighter when needed (despite gentle demeanor)
- Models UU values in her life
- Takes care of her own ministerial health through clergy gatherings
- Shows up in person and follows through on commitments

#### **Areas of Concern or Questions (Minority Views)**

##### **Pastoral Care Capacity**

- Some participants expressed concern about bandwidth for pastoral care given extensive social justice commitments
- A few noted they haven't had direct pastoral care interactions
- Questions about who handles conflict resolution within congregation
- Concern about ministers being overworked and needing to protect their time

##### **South Bay Focus**

- One participant expressed concern about amount of time spent at South Bay given smaller membership there
- Question about whether enough community outreach is happening to grow South Bay beyond existing Hillcrest members

**General Uncertainty**

- One participant (75% supportive rather than 100%) expressed some reservation but acknowledged this may be expecting too much from one person
- Questions about clear delineation of roles between Lead and Associate Minister going forward

**Conclusion**

**The congregational conversations revealed overwhelming, enthusiastic support for calling Rev. Kristen as settled Associate Minister. Participants see her as embodying the qualities of their ideal Associate Minister and as essential to the congregation's stability and future growth during this transitional period.**