



First  
Unitarian Universalist  
Church of San Diego

# FirstWords

Our Monthly Magazine

August 2020; Vol 14 No. 6

## Meet Our Live Streaming Guru Anna Liza Castel Smith

By Ame Stanko

With an extensive background in photography, videography, broadcasting, and computer network administration, Anna Liza Castel Smith is at the core of the team broadcasting our service live to the internet every week. On a Thursday in mid-March, I found out we would have to temporarily suspend our in-person worship services. As one of the people who'd been working on live streaming First UU services, I was tapped to put one together for the following Sunday.

I leapt into action, assembled equipment, contacted the worship team and other tech folks, and on Friday night, I did a test on the First UU Facebook page. My "solution" was rudimentary . . . just an iPad and a lavalier mic. Several people posted encouraging comments and one was Anna who mentioned she was a professional broadcaster and to let her know if I needed help. I called her immediately and, without a moment's hesitation, she dropped everything to jump in.

Just three days later, using her experience and all her own equipment, she literally saved the day, broadcasting our first ever live streamed service from Rev. Tania's office. Since then, Anna has worked every Saturday and Sunday to make our live stream services happen. She's also provided sound help, video editing, and tech consulting and she attends the weekly worship planning meeting. It's a lot!

Some of you probably already know Anna. She's a longtime church member and she and her husband, Brandon, were married by Rev. Kathleen. When not working, Anna can be found passionately advocating for

social justice and spending time with her family.

I'm not one to believe in miracles, but, without Anna, that first live streamed service would have been a low quality Facebook live stream of only the ministers speaking.

Thanks to her, we have a highly interactive service in three languages featuring ministers, guests, and musicians streamed live to Facebook, YouTube, and our website.

Considering all of the software, hardware, and coordination involved, it really is kind of miraculous. We're in the process of getting the church set up with its own live streaming equipment and learning how to put the service together live when Anna's not available. (She'll need a weekend off eventually!) So please be patient—it's a work in progress.



In the meantime, I hope you'll join me in expressing a ton of gratitude for the incredible work that Anna has been doing to keep us all connected online at a time when many of us have found the online services to be an emotional lifeline. Anna's dedication to making the service better every week is truly commendable and we're lucky to have her.

Thank you, Anna!

### Also in this issue:

- Connections and Community by Rev. Kathleen Owens Pg 2
- Changes in Family Ministry by the Family Ministry Team Pg 3
- Virtual General Assembly is a Hit by John Schaibly Pg 4
- Knowledge is Power by Jan Garbosky Pg 5
- Joel Johnson by Andrew Ferrier Pg 6
- Looking Glass Theatre's First All Digital Production Pg 7

# Connections and Cultivating Community

By Rev. Kathleen Owens, *Lead Minister*



Since we've been broadcasting our worship services live in March, I've been learning a lot about Connection, our theme for August. There are multiple connections required to broadcast the worship service . . . between two cameras, mics, lights, mixers, zoom, and other software platforms, there are miles of cords, numerous plugs and adapters, and hundreds of settings to check as we go live with the service. Sometimes these connections get twisted up or adapters go missing or settings don't hold.

Then there's the need for worship leadership to connect to people—but now, with distance and cameras, it can feel difficult to connect to people you can't physically see. And sometimes, the longing for connection or connecting doesn't always happen—for many reasons.

I'm grateful we have the ability to broadcast our worship services, and yet, I can see how often, between and among people, we try to make connections that aren't always felt. Like readying for broadcast worship, preparing for and making connections takes time. They're not always going to happen the way you think they should or the way you want them to. There will be mistakes or missing adapters or default settings that make connecting harder.

Cultivating community requires time and willingness and vulnerability. Cultivating community requires multiple efforts of connecting in a variety of ways because we need to be connected—we know we're part of an interdependent web of existence. Poet Marge Piercy's reading (#568 in the grey hymnal) reminds us some "connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground. You cannot tell always by looking what is happening. More than half a tree is spread out in the soil under your feet."

Unitarian Universalism promotes connections as we listen to one another, seek truth together, create justice, dismantle oppression, and work for liberation. I've found when I take the time to connect with the truth that resides in my being, when I make the effort to connect to the wisdom found in the still small voice within, then connecting with others, to learn and grow is always a blessing.

I wish you good connections in this month.

Faithfully yours,

*Rev. Kathleen*

## August Sermon Messages

### Worship Time:

Live Streamed Worship: Sunday, 9:30 am  
(Bilingual & ASL Interpretation)

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

### August's Transformational Theme is: "Connection"

#### August 2, 2020

##### "Connecting History"

Rev. Tania Márquez  
*Assistant Minister*

#### August 9, 2020

##### "Stewards of the Earth"

Rev. Tania Márquez  
*Assistant Minister*

#### August 16, 2020

##### "Once Upon a Time of Pandemic"

Rev. Kathleen Owens  
*Lead Minister*

#### August 23, 2020

##### "The Time of Transitions"

Rev. Kathleen Owens  
*Lead Minister*

#### August 30, 2020

##### "Our Bridging Service"

The Family Ministry Team

# Changes in Family Ministry

by the Family Ministry Team

There are recent changes in our Family Ministry team and program. Rev. Kathleen has joined the Family Ministry team and is making Family Ministry a priority in her portfolio in the absence of a Director of Family Ministry and Lifetime Learning position. It's a pleasure for Rev. Kathleen to work with Käthe Larick, Youth Program Coordinator, and Tony Bianca, Religious Education Program Assistant.

Rev. Kathleen has also met recently with parents in the Parents' Lounge to hear and respond to issues as they arise. There's a new Parent Advisory group forming that will work closely with the Family Ministry staff team. New programs have started for the summer, including a new Middle School group that's meeting on Sunday afternoons with Käthe.

The Saturday morning religious education program, led by Tony, has a new focus in science, animals, and movement. And on Mondays, Tony is offering Magic Mondays—a time to watch and learn some magic. Thanks to some generous donors, the Family Ministry staff and Parent Advisory Group will be working with a paid consultant who

identifies as a BIPOC community member and specializes in religious education as we center anti-racist, anti-oppression work in our religious education programs.

With the consultant, we'll create our fall and winter programs. Stay tuned to this space for volunteer opportunities as we reimagine how religious education teachers can re-engage in our RE program, even as we

continue meeting virtually. We're also reaching out to parents and families about ways they can be a regular part of our Online Worship services (Affirmation, Chalice Lighting, and Time for all Ages).

Finally, in the near future, the Family Ministry team and Parent Advisory group will create a survey for parents and families to fill

out, so the team can learn more specifically about how First Church can meet the needs families have. The survey will focus on the needs the congregation can meet (and the support we can give) in the present virtual format, as well as long range, when we meet in person again.



# Virtual General Assembly is a Hit

by John Schaibly, *Lay Leader for Denominational Relations and Larger UU Connections*



**Rooted, Inspired, & Ready!**

2020 General Assembly (GA), originally planned for Providence, Rhode Island, became a virtual conference for the first time via Zoom.

It was one of the most well-attended GAs in recent history (with almost 5,000 registrants), largely because of reduced cost. First UU sent a full slate of 13 delegates and 17 non-delegates, many for the first time. Delegates usually give reports at church on GA Sunday, coupled with a fundraising lunch by Friends of de Benneville Pines.

Unfortunately, since there will be no GA Sunday this year, our camp will be shortchanged the profits from our lunch. Friends of de Benneville Pines encourages you to help them cover the shortfall. Please consider a direct donation to camp at [www.uucamp.org/contribute/covid-19-emergency-fund/](http://www.uucamp.org/contribute/covid-19-emergency-fund/). We thank you!

Here are reports from a couple of the delegates to GA this year:

**Jan Gallo:** I've had the opportunity to attend many, though not all, GAs beginning in 1997 in Phoenix, Arizona, where I was a volunteer. I have loved traveling to GA, so attending a virtual GA left me less than excited. However, as it turned out, it was a wonderful experience. All the workshops were well done and as informative as those I had attended in person in the past. Worship services were deeply meaningful. I so hope all future GAs will be available virtually, even when we can attend in person. It's essential we make this conference accessible for all.

**Steve Gelb:** I found GA to be inspiring, rejuvenating, and revelatory. I was glued to the sessions led by the Commission on Institutional Change that unpacked unflinchingly, yet compassionately, the centrality of White supremacy culture in our congregations, the injuries it has caused, and suggested ways to

transform it. Among other things, the Commission challenged us to recognize that freedom and individuality as a religious creed is inadequate in these times. And, "justice making [alone] is not a substitute for a coherent theology, and faithful justice making requires a liberatory theology." I look forward to discussing and responding to this generative report with other members of the congregation.

**Sylvia Ollinger:** This was my third GA, and I loved the virtual aspect of it, which allowed me to continue other responsibilities and still participate. As co-leader of our Climate Justice Team, I was eager to hear Naomi Klein speak at the Ware Lecture.

I attended many workshops that had to do with the oppression of people of color. My take-aways include: Institutional racism needs to be solved by White people, as we are the beneficiaries of it, and we all have our own implicit biases that need to be dealt with. Also, that we are in a time of great shock, which can be a time of much positive change. We must choose to move more swiftly toward an inclusive democracy, with greater opportunity for all.

This time is also an opportunity to move quickly on the existential threat that is climate change. Naomi Klein pushes us to pass the Green New Deal, as we have only 12 years to cut our emissions in half. We must re-think air travel, which is so polluting. We must slow down, consume less, and perhaps go to a four-day work week. We must work to elect leaders who will deal effectively with the climate emergency.

In an upcoming issue, we hope to share insights from more delegates and non-delegates who attended this historic GA. Hopefully, the success of this virtual conference will result in future GAs continuing with off-site folks—even when we can meet again in-person. We hope you'll consider attending next year virtually or in person in Milwaukee, June 21-28, 2021!

# Knowledge is Power: What You Can Do to Help First UU Dismantle White Supremacy & Other Oppressions

by Jan Garbosky for *Journey Toward Wholeness (JTW)*



Becoming a truly welcoming and radically inclusive congregation is not up to the ministers, the Board, the JTW Core Team, or any Ministry Team or First UU group. It's up to me and it's up to you. Just like it's up to each of us to wear a mask to keep others safe from Covid-19—even if we're asymptomatic, it's up to each of us to keep all First UU members and friends safe and unharmed, able to follow their own spiritual path, and to act on our values to heal the world. We can only do that when we understand institutional racism and the critical part each of us non-BIPOC (white) members and friends **must** play in striking it down.

Since August 2019, JTW has published mini-articles in the *Window*, First UU's weekly newsletter. Titled "What Can I Do?" the articles hold a prominent place on the lower right hand corner of page 1. Have you seen them? Have you taken the time to read one or more of the articles? Have you taken the time to read, watch, or listen to any of the items listed? I hope you have. In case you haven't yet, you have another chance. We'll be publishing them in chronological order in this and future issues of First Words.

This work has never been more important—to our congregation, to our city, to our state, and to our nation. But more importantly, this work is important for our individual spiritual growth. It is messy, sometimes uncomfortable work. And, it's the work we each must do to be the congregation we aspire to be.

Finding time is less of an issue these days. Pick one a week. Reflect on what you hear, read, or watch.

Talk with a trusted friend or significant other. Join the work, for yourself and for those who have left First UU or struggle to remain at First UU because of how they've been treated. Their feelings are real and not to be discounted.

1) Watch: Rev. Marta Valentin's powerful sermon "It Is Time Now" from the Sunday service at General Assembly (GA) 2019. Marta is responsible for our History Wall that was on display in the Meeting House. Access the entire service created by Rev. Valentin "In This Delicate Turning" at <https://www.uua.org/ga/off-site/2019/worship/sunday> The sermon begins at 35:47 but is only one element in the beautiful service she crafted.

2) Watch: A short video "Systemic Racism Explained" (4:23): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrHIQIO\\_bdQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrHIQIO_bdQ)

3) Read: In 1989, Peggy McIntosh published "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" [www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf](http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf) She identifies **50** unearned privileges non-BIPOC (white folks) receive in our society that BIPOC (Black/Indigenous/People of Color) cannot claim. No better time to read it than now!

4) Read "White Supremacy Culture." Discover "The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture" by Kenneth Jones & Tema Okun published in 2001. As you read, reflect on the characteristics that show up in our congregation (and other organizations in your life). [www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html](http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html)

5) Read "Ten Myths White People Believe About Racism." Adapted from Carolyn B. Hessel's book *Preaching About Racism: A Guide for Faith Leaders*, published by Chalice Press, we're given a chance to explore, reflect, and grow. <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/ten-myths-white-people-believe-about-racism>

# Joel Johnson

by Andrew Ferrier

As a child growing up in West Hollywood, Joel Johnson saw Margaret Hamilton at church, and ran away to hide. (Margaret Hamilton played the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*.) Another of Joel's neighbors in the West Hollywood area was Mary Tyler Moore.

Joel grew up in the golden age of radio, and attended a special event hosted by Frank Sinatra of the live radio program "Your Hit Parade." Joel remembers the girls in bobby sox screaming when Mr. Sinatra knelt. Joel had the same nose doctor as actor, comedian, and singer Jimmy Durante. One day, Joel saw him in the lobby of the clinic. "Hello, Mr. Durante," said Joel, and was given a friendly smile by the great Durante.

During formative teenage years at Hollywood High School, Joel recognized he was different in some ways from his peers. Curious about his condition, he went to the public library to read about it. The only mention he found of homosexuality was in a tome about psychological deviation. Joel was not lonely, though. Among his friends were African Americans and people of Jewish heritage.

Joel has been a life-long learner, from his college education at Stanford, to business school at Thunderbird (in Phoenix, Arizona), to his teaching credential through UC Berkeley. Between 2003 and 2018, Joel completed well over 1,200 courses and excursions through San Diego Oasis, more than anyone else has taken. At First UU, Joel has taken many classes offered through religious education and has attended the Christian Study group and the Cosmos Group.

During a lifetime that spans nine decades, Joel has witnessed many things that most of us can only read about. He has vivid memories of blackouts of the West Coast during WWII. When he was working at his first job in 1956, for Paramount Pictures in Rio de Janeiro, he saw the start of a minor coup d'etat. While visiting Mexico City with his brother, they fled from gun shots during the unrest of the late fifties.

At the end of the 1950's, Joel lived in New York City. He saw Ethel Merman in "Gypsy" in 1959. He returned there in 1964, and saw Carol Channing in "Hello, Dolly." Joel kept the programs from these shows and many more. A few years ago, he donated his collection to San Diego State University. The collection includes programs from shows that his mother saw, dating back to the 1920's. When the youth group at First UU went to see "Wicked" at the Pantages Theater in Hollywood, Joel went along, and gave the young people a walking tour of his old stomping grounds around Hollywood and Vine.

Plans are afoot for Joel to be interviewed by church leaders about his involvement in gay awareness and activism before Stonewall. Watch for announcements to hear about how the gay community managed to publicly gather in relative safety. Joel may tell about how he and members of the Mattachine Society were assigned "dates" from the ranks of the Daughters of Bilitis. The couples boarded the ferry to Fire Island. When they arrived at Fire Island, the women regrouped, and the men joined the other men.

When Joel moved to San Francisco, he sought out the Unitarian Church, having heard about it through trusted friends. Joel felt accepted there. He also found solace at the UU church in Santa Monica when his only brother died of AIDS. When Joel moved to San Diego in 1988, it made sense to attend the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego.

As Joel approaches his tenth decade of life, he continues to deal with failing eyesight. He was only forty-two when he was diagnosed with macular degeneration. In 1988 he was declared legally blind and was not able to continue working. In San Diego, despite his disability, he served at the Gay and Lesbian Center when it was on Fifth Avenue. He currently accesses services at the San Diego Center for the Blind. Joel Johnson gets around on foot and by public transit. When you stop to say hello, please announce yourself, as he may not recognize you by sight.



*Looking Glass Theatre Presents*

# Zooming **In**



**A Compilation of Short Plays for the Virtual Stage**

Join Looking Glass Theatre as we debut  
our first all digital production!

The show will be available for viewing  
beginning August 15, 2020 at  
[Lookingglasssd.org](http://Lookingglasssd.org)

*and*

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**Free of Charge!!!!**

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 and Rev. Katy Swanson, Affiliate Community Ministers  
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 Käthe Larick, Youth Programs Coordinator  
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 Lorelei Garner, South Bay Music Coordinator & Women's Chorus Director  
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