

First
Unitarian Universalist
Church of San Diego

FirstWords

Our Monthly Magazine

February 2020; Vol 14 No. 2

Meet our new Director of Family and Lifespan Ministry

By Nancy Fisk

After a year's search for a Director of Family and Lifespan Ministry, Kathleen Swift took over in July 2019. She was previously at Chalice UU as their Religious Education Director. Before that, she was a public school teacher for grades kindergarten through 8th grade. One of her jobs was at a one room school house on Palomar Mountain for two years. She's also been a principal at charter schools in the area. She has a multiple subject teaching credential and a Masters in Administration.



She started attending Chalice with her partner, Judy, so Judy could make friends in the area. Judy became active in singing in the choir, and Kathleen kept coming to church. After taking a job at Chalice as the office administrator, the RE Director position came open, so she applied and was hired. Since then, she has also completed many Renaissance modules, the Unitarian Universalist Association's programs for training Religious Education Directors.

Kathleen has lived with her family in Ramona since 1970. She still lives on the same property she grew up on with her mother, her partner, one of her adult sons, two dogs, and a cat. She has three adult children and two grandchildren. One of her grandchildren, Koji, 10 years old, comes to First Church with her on occasion. He likes our campus because it's so big. He also likes doing new things every time in our religious education classes.

Kathleen has been a UU now for 10 years. She loves our principles because even though they're sometimes hard to follow, they're important. She also likes that so many diverse people are able to follow many different paths to

happiness in Unitarian Universalism, and that all those paths are respected.

As the Director of Family and Lifespan Ministries, she's focused on the plans for the kindergarten through grade 5 curriculum and working with families. There's a need to redo Adult Education, and planning for that will begin in February. She's also overseeing the Our Whole Lives program (OWL) as part of her duties. The OWL classes will focus on middle school and Kindergarten-1st grade in the spring.

Finally, First Church is participating in beta testing a curriculum called Beloved Conversations for Families that will begin at the end of April. This first session will be for multi-racial families and families of color.

Kathleen is a musician—she sings, plays guitar and piano, and loves singing with her partner Judy. Other hobbies include camping, star-gazing, and photography. When she has time, she travels with her mother.

She depends on the volunteers for Religious Education and appreciates their help. Welcome to First Church, Kathleen!

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Resilience

By Rev. Kathleen Owens, *Lead Minister*



Just saying the word “Resilience” brings so much to mind. Its definition includes “the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties.” Recovering quickly can be a challenge and, when I think of resilience, strength, supportive community, and beauty come to my mind. Throughout the month of February we’ll be exploring this theme and some questions about it: How to cultivate resilience? What’s the role of this faith tradition in cultivating

resilience? Can a person have too much resilience?

All of us have need of more resilience in our beings. Our country and specifically, its leadership have created difficulties for so many people and the future of this planet. We need resilience to recover from them so we can create a better world for all. Building strength requires intention and action, in repetition of movements or habits that increase our stamina to continue living lives of values.

Having a supportive community makes all the difference when cultivating resilience. Without a supportive community, it’s easy to turn to apathy under the daily assaults we and our planet experience. Supportive community reminds us we’re not alone; community can be healing, offering comfort and other points of view that can bring some fresh insight.

I know community can also be challenging. There’s much to gain when, confronted with challenges, community members stay at the table, keep open minds, listen deeply, and seek common ground. Engaging community in these ways can offer more support, bigger ideas, and encouragement.

Resilience is also cultivated when we spend time with beauty—creating it and immersing ourselves in it. Beauty reminds us that our current experiences are not the only thing happening in the world, that life and rebirth and growth can be relied on. Margaret Weis, a fantasy and science fiction author, writes that resilience also requires some courage, tears and doubt, silence and laughter, wonder and trust.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word Resilience? Let’s embolden one another in this work so we might make a difference in our lives and in our larger community.

Faithfully,

Rev. Kathleen

February Sermon Messages

Worship Times:

Hillcrest Campus: Sunday, 9:30 am and 11:30 am (ASL Interpretation)

South Bay Campus: Sunday, 9:30 am (Intergenerational, Bilingual)

February’s Transformational Theme is: "Resilience"

February 2, 2020

Hillcrest Services—

"Strengthening Resiliency"

Rev. Kathleen Owens, *Lead Minister*

South Bay Service—

"What Bob, Bill and Rhoda's Friends Learn"

Rev. Jim Grant, *Affiliate Minister*

February 9, 2020

Hillcrest Services—

"Pt. 1, Another Name for Love"

Rev. Kathleen Owens, *Lead Minister*

South Bay Service—

"Rising from the Ashes"

Rev. Tania Márquez, *Assistant Minister*

February 16, 2020

Hillcrest Services—

"Pt. 2, Another Name for Love"

Rev. Kathleen Owens, *Lead Minister*

South Bay Service—

Rev. Tania Márquez, *Assistant Minister*

February 23, 2020

Hillcrest Services—

"To Be a Good Neighbor"

Rev. Tania Márquez, *Assistant Minister*

South Bay Service—

"Another Name for Love"

Rev. Kathleen Owens, *Lead Minister*

Parents' Lounge

By Kathleen Swift, *Family and Lifespan Ministry Director*



One of the important areas of my work involves serving and promoting the needs of families at First UU. Parents appreciate interacting with each other for many reasons. About four years ago, a group of parents wanted to start a monthly meeting. They worked with Melissa James, who was the Director of Children and Family Ministries at the time. They called themselves “Parents’ Lounge” because they were meeting in the Law Lounge just off Bard Hall, although they quickly outgrew that space and now meet upstairs in room 323.

According to Parke Troutman, one of the founders of the group, the Parents’ Lounge has met on the first Sunday of the month for over four years (second Sunday if there’s a holiday). In June, it meets at Camp de Benneville Pines, during All-Church Camp weekend. Childcare is provided by the church for the convenience of the parents.

The group, which describes themselves as informal, selects topics of discussion at the beginning of the year. They’re often based on a challenge someone in the group is facing. Topics have included: Race, Navigating Holidays, Gender, Encouraging Achievement and Creativity, Being UU, Self-care, Peer Relations, Cultural Influences: Princesses and Superheroes, Changing Family Dynamics, Talking about Current Events, and Development Stages in Children’s Spirituality. Whoever is the inspiration for that month’s topic begins with what in their life makes that subject important to them—then it’s an open dialogue until it’s time to pick up the kids

from childcare. Sometimes children join their parents, if they prefer to stay with their parents in the meeting space.

One project that grew out of the Parents’ Lounge has the working name of “The Book Project.” Parents from the group reached out to the Journey Toward Wholeness Team, asking for help in creating a cart for children’s books that depict diversity. Together, we’ve made some progress on this and it looks like it’ll become a wonderful

resource. We expect to offer picture books and chapter books, and possibly parenting books. All of these will be recommended by First UU parents.

Parke Troutman explains, “Parents’ Lounge is often the place where new people have

their first sustained conversation with people in the congregation at the same life stage as themselves. It’s a great place to get ideas, kvetch, and talk about acting on your values when you really just want your kids to put their shoes on without having to be told ten times.”

I’ve always said there’s “real time” and “kid time.” So, when I asked Parke what the starting time for the group is, I had to chuckle at his answer: “11-ish.” He tells me they aim for 11:00 but that the group has never actually started on time. I remember having young children, and I can imagine picking them up from their RE classes, going to get a few bites to eat, grabbing some coffee, greeting friends, then heading over to Room 105 to sign them into childcare. Thus, the “11-ish” start time feels just right.



Tea Talks or Charlas con té

By Rev. Tania Márquez, Assistant Minister



Charlas are relaxed and friendly conversations that happens with a person or in a small group. The word is a positive one. In Spanish, we usually don't use it to mean that we had a serious or difficult conversation with someone. It can also be heartfelt.

That's the goal of Tea Talks or *Charlas con té*, to be an unstructured and relaxed space for conversation and connection.

Tea in my Mexican background and experience is always used as a type of medicine and to cure all kinds of ailments. It's both soothing and comforting which is why I decided to make it part of the conversation space I'm trying to create. Of course, as I've opened the space, I'm learning about how people from other cultures understand tea and the flavors they like. My chamomile tea (which I love for its calming and soothing properties) has been mostly overlooked and other spiced and flavored teas chosen. Perhaps in one of those tea talks I will invite people to share how their taste for tea has been influenced by their cultural upbringing or life experiences.

In any case, when I set up the tea station and open up the space, I never know who's going to show up and how the conversation is going to go. Just in case the group doesn't find it easy to start a conversation, I come prepared with books, music, or other objects that can serve as conversation starters. But, I've not needed to use them yet.

After each person grabs a cup of tea, the conversation starts slowly until everyone is participating.

I've only been offering tea talks for three months. Two out of the three months I've had about four or five people attend at a time. The conversation has included so many topics already: social media, food insecurity, dreams, liminal spaces, music, and so much more. It's offered me an opportunity to get to know people more and I think it's given the opportunity for people to interact and get to know each other better. Sometimes, congregants do come with very specific questions about projects they're working on within the church or with questions about ministry and the congregation. I think it's fair to say we don't stay on a specific topic for too long. Sometimes someone will say something that will carry the conversation in a different direction. At the end, it's the people who show up that direct the conversation.

Everyone's always welcome to attend and no one's expected to stay for the entire time. Though that's often been the case for some who have attended, people are welcome to join in and leave at any time.

Because Tea Talks are open to everyone, they're not a good time for one-on-one or pastoral conversations. But they're a good opportunity to get to know other people in our community or simply to come into a space that all it asks from you is to show up, grab a cup of tea if you want to, and open yourself to conversations.

Tea talks/*Charlas con té* happen on the second Thursday at South Bay from 3:30 pm to 5 pm, and on the third Thursday at Hillcrest from 1-2:30 pm. I'm always thrilled to see new and familiar faces, so I hope you'll join me for tea and conversation one of these days.

Interfaith Homeless Shelter

By Nancy Fisk

Jerry Ollinger has been a volunteer for the past eight years with the Interfaith Homeless Shelter, which is coordinated by the Interfaith Shelter Network in San Diego County. Jerry is co-chair of the homeless shelter at First UU, along with Angela Fujii, our Social Justice Ministry Team Coordinator. I asked him about his recent experience with the shelter.

First UU hosted a shelter for three weeks over Christmas and New Years. Jerry especially appreciated Angela Fujii, who organized many of the details required of a shelter. Normally, the shelter runs two weeks. We did an extra week because another church dropped out and there was a two-week gap between our shelter and the next one. Another church took over the additional week.

First Church was considered a hero with the Network, for not only taking the additional week but for doing it over the holiday season. During the shelter there were 21 guests. The most we had at any one time was 11, the fewest five. Some were able to go into what is called rapid housing — stable housing where they're offered a stipend of \$1,000 a month to get on their feet. It helps the person accepting the stipend to establish references and save for the first and last month's rent, for after the stipend ends.

In the shelter program, food, shelter, and showers are provided. The guests stay overnight, get up at 6 am to get ready for the day, and by 7:30 am, are out for the day with a bag lunch. Half of the guests have jobs, others are looking for jobs, and some have children they need to take to school. There's a caseworker assigned to each guest in the shelter. The hope is those who are temporarily homeless can gain some momentum to get back into a home.

Otherwise, being on the street is a spiral that is difficult to pull out of.

After a background check, a guest can be in the network for 6-8 weeks. The limited time is a motivation to look for work, if that's what they need.



**INTERFAITH
SHELTER
NETWORK**

There are many jobs for volunteers at the shelter. In the evening, there's a greeter, and two volunteers who stay overnight. Different groups prepare meals every night. Jerry was impressed with the quality of the food. "It was outstanding, even the chili. Besides that, we had tamales, turkey, chicken, and vegetarian meals." Other duties can be taking guests to do laundry, going shopping for food, setting up the shelter, and breaking it down. One area that needed more volunteers this time was the breakdown of the shelter. Breakdown involves folding up the cots and getting gear ready for the next church who is doing the shelter. They also need to clean the refrigerator and clean

the rooms of the church used in the shelter. Bedding for the shelter is washed and reused, and hygiene items are donated. First UU has also come through financially for the Shelter, which is very impressive.

Last year, First Church also hosted a shelter for LGBTQ guests for two weeks, a new effort by the Interfaith Homeless Shelter. Not all churches are willing to host this type of shelter. First UU may host another LGBTQ shelter this summer.

Jerry enjoys working with and becoming friends with other congregants who help at the shelter. He encourages others to consider volunteering with the shelter the next time the opportunity arises.

The Music of Resilience

By Tony Bianca, *Program Assistant, Handbell Choirs Director & Children's Choir Director*



As a child, singing came naturally for me, but learning an instrument took work. In 4th grade, I dreaded the one hour each week when I'd walk the two blocks from my house to the convent for guitar lessons with Sister Kathleen. I'd stare at the page and desperately try to will my fingers to find the right frets and strings, wishing I'd practiced more (or at all) the previous week. It seemed like the minute I'd figured out the first measure, the chord would change and the song would screech to a halt as I figured out where my fingers needed to go for the next one. As soon as my guitar playing became barely passable, we started piano lessons and the torture started all over again.

When I play now, there are moments when I don't even think about my fingers. Movements that once took minutes of concentrated effort now just happen, but that "just happening" didn't just happen—it took time, patience, and a lot of resilience.

Looking back on the process, I recognize that, in addition to learning to play, I also learned some valuable lessons about life, mistakes, and the nature of resilience. First, I've come to understand that what we call "practice" or "rehearsal" is really organized mistake-making. Piano practice was torturous because I hated making mistakes at such a high volume and frequency. But that's the whole point! It's not fun, in the traditional sense, but it's necessary, and it can even be a little fun if I accept it's going to happen and laugh at myself when it does. When I give myself permission to be imperfect, I can see my imperfections as opportunities for growth rather than failings.

Secondly, I've taken to heart what one of my college music teachers told me: "Make big mistakes loudly. If you can't hear them, you can't fix them." There's a fairly unhelpful tendency to play or sing timidly until we're confident that we know the part. We think that maybe our mistakes will go unnoticed and we'll sound better. But think about how backwards that is. In a rehearsal setting, surrounded by people waiting to lovingly hear our mistakes and help us fix them, we try to hide our mistakes so they go unnoticed!?! I still struggle with this, but like to think I'm more comfortable allowing myself to make big, bold mistakes, knowing they'll be heard and that I'll be supported in doing what I can to fix them. My "job" is to develop the resilience necessary to make those mistakes and not be defined by them.

Finally, I've learned that, whether I make a mistake or not, the beat goes on. Unlike what happened those many years ago when I was taking lessons at the convent, the music can't grind to a halt as I figure out how the next part goes. Of course, in a rehearsal, I can wait until an appropriate break to ask for help, but as I'm singing, I have to just forge ahead. There's a certain power and freedom in knowing things don't have to stop completely just because I'm not 100% certain about how they're supposed to be. If I trip over a word or hit a wrong note, I can just keep going and, eventually, I'll figure it out and get back on track. The power comes not from being perfect, but from being imperfect and being ok with that because I know I'll get better over time . . . and that's as good a definition of resilience as I know.

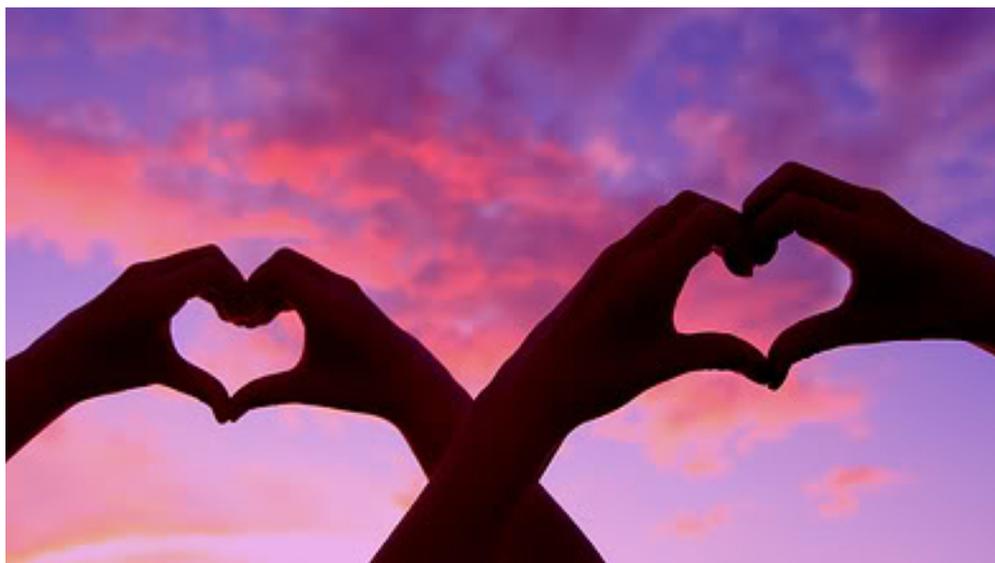


Reflection

By Alex Bates Lamparella, given at the December 8th, 2019 service Theme: Restoring Community

16 years, two months, and nine days into my life I was diagnosed with low malignant potential epithelial ovarian cancer. This was something 16 years two months and five days me could've never imagined. I'd finally escaped what I believed to be the worst time of my life. I left the high school of my freshman year—left the bullying, sexual assaults, the fear, the self-hatred of it all behind. I'd lived through countless people who convinced me my life wasn't worth living, only for my life to suddenly feel out of my hands.

I spent days, months really, wishing those people would hurt in a way that I did. Working so hard to convince myself that because I held a kind heart, the body around it couldn't possibly crumble—all the while wishing that so many



hurtful minds would eventually have a broken vessel of a body as well.

Despite and because of all this, I've learned that all beings have inherent worth and dignity. I believe in this statement with no exceptions, and I believe that this statement always has been and always will be true. This was taught to me through my religious community, and although my emotions occasionally desire to overthrow this belief, living by it has been the most clarifying experience. When faced with beings who have a different opinion, I remind myself of this. When faced with fear, I remind myself of this.

Throughout my life, it's always been difficult for me to understand how my minister could see someone so hateful, so violent, so cruel, and still believe they

have worth and dignity. But, throughout the years, I've found the old saying rings true: "Hate/anger is a hot coal—it can be passed on, but it will never stop burning." When someone chooses to see a hateful, hurtful, or destructive person in any way that is less than worthy and dignified, therefore objectifying them, they choose to participate in holding the hot coal.

Now, that's not to say I want to befriend, or even be around hateful people (unfortunately that's not within anyone's control), but I do believe that

because they have worth and dignity, they are me in the same way that I have worth and dignity. And, if I can forgive myself and allow myself to be vulnerable and admit mistakes, I would hope all other worthy and dignity-

filled beings around me can as well.

Because I believe it's not the capability of hate that shocks people, it's the ability to love, resiliently, and repeatedly, that makes our civilizations fall to their knees. This love I talk about is not one of comfort or ease, it's one fueled by the compassionate desire for yourself and others to grow. This love doesn't hold hands with Nazis, but it doesn't kill them either. It says, "I hope you can find a way to heal yourself so you never need to hate or hurt others so deeply again." This love shows up over and over again, but it knows limits. It doesn't tolerate abuse, bigotry, or fear—it functions upon the very premise that, at our foundation, we're each capable of living into our worth and dignity in expansive and revolutionary ways.

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