On June 11, I'll be moving on from First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, with the completion of my year of intern ministry here. Moving toward any conclusion can be difficult spiritual work, and I'm finding these last few weeks no different. But most fundamentally, I'm connected with a deep wellspring of gratitude for you all, and for the Spirit that has carried us through these last ten months. The ways you've helped me grow, change, ask deep questions, and connect has fundamentally made me a better minister, colleague, and friend. I'll carry First UU wherever I go next.

I'm always impressed with the way this congregation has championed its intern ministry program. I saw this in the willingness throughout the year for us to experiment in worship together. I saw this in the curiosity you brought to our encounters. I saw this in the wisdom you offered at just the right moments. I saw this in how the Spirit Level Foundation supports the program financially. It's made a great difference in my time here. I especially want to lift up the amazing work of my intern minister committee: thank you to Dorothy Pearlman, Sue McLeod, Ben Fowler, Liz Jones, Kimsa Daslyn, and Noved Salpour for offering unparalleled guidance and feedback as I learned about parish ministry.

The end of my internship will also mark the end of my pastoral and ministerial relationship with you all, and after General Assembly, I will observe some time when I stay out of regular communication with our First UU community. This mostly is to help ease my own transition and help me focus on what next steps lay ahead. But I'll send updates about my next steps to the ministers (because they are not all figured out just yet!) and they can keep everyone informed.

I do know that on June 12, I'll begin a long drive to Spokane, WA, where I'll serve our denomination's General Assembly Youth Staff. Then I'll make my way across the northern route of the country, ending up in Queens, NY, where I'll be living for the foreseeable future. I do know I'll miss the communities I've served—including the South Bay Wisdom Circle, the Young Adult Group, the Campus Ministry Group—very much. My deep gratitude to my colleagues in ministry—Ian, Tania, and Kathleen—and all the wonderful staff that help make this place a joyful working place. Thank you all so much.

In faith,

Goodbye

By Stevie K. Carmody, Intern Minister

Our Monthly Publication

First Words

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
First Words, 4190 Front Street, San Diego, CA 92103
By Rev. Kathleen Owens, Lead Minister

How do you define 'Just Community'? It’s an important question that focuses on our worship this month, 'Just Community. It can be interpreted in many ways, including just community, said in a way of being flip or casual. It’s easy to go there because when you’re involved in a community, it’s easy to take the community for granted. It’s easy to think the people who make up the community will always be there. Maybe we think we don’t have to be so mindful with our words or actions, and we think we can fix or repair the relationship later.

But sometimes, that isn’t possible. Community these days, especially religious community, is anything but casual or something about which to be flip. Finding community and finding a way to make a difference in the world are among the top reasons to come visit our two campuses. There isn’t an opportunity to experience community as it’s created by a faith tradition. People attending here also hope that this community will be different, because of our stated principles, our values, and the words of welcome we say.

They are hoping, we’re serious about welcoming them, about respecting their worth and dignity—especially if they haven’t experienced that in other faith communities. Being a participant in a community involves responsibility for one’s self in the community and finding opportunities to support and strengthen the community. Being part of a community can be a comfort when feeling afraid or alone; it can open one to other perspectives and experiences; it can be joyful and enriching as well as frustrating and challenging.

Being in a community offers a variety of ways to grow and learn and grow some more. But what is ‘Just Community’? For me, ‘Just Community’ is about a group of people coming together to lean in as we explore the meaning of community and how it means something different for many. It’s living the adjective definition of just: a community guided by truth, reason, justice, according to our principles. And, there is nothing flip or casual about it.

Faithfully yours,

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Marcus’ Sunday mornings begin with a shopping spree. He looks for items that are on sale that day, including fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables, and brings them to the church for preparation, arriving in the kitchen by 9 am. The church has a frugal kitchen budget, supplemented by donations from those who partake of the food, so don’t forget to drop a donation in the basket as you wander by.

In addition to making the coffee and putting on the kettle for tea, there’s lots of slicing, dicing and arranging to do, and Marcus, who prepares food for 200 after the first service, and for 100 after the second, can’t do it all alone. His lovely wife Laura often helps out, and members of the Men’s Fellowship volunteer on the first Sunday of each month, but Marcus wants you to know he always needs volunteers, and it doesn’t take any special training. No matter your skill level, Marcus will put you to work, and under his expert supervision, you’ll turn out beautiful creations to feed our hungry congregation.

We couldn’t have a better qualified chef to run the kitchen, although Marcus got into the field almost by accident. He and Laura, high school sweethearts in northern California, were working at Yosemite National Park about 18 years ago when Marcus began cooking. Their jobs often took them to remote High Sierra locations where the food had to be packed or helicoptered in.

Marcus sometimes prepared the camp meals and discovered that cooking was a calming, enjoyable past-time for him, allowing him to focus wholly in the present. From Yosemite, he was hired at Walt Disney World in Orlando, where he worked at a Norwegian restaurant in Epcot Center. Disney thought enough of his abilities that they paid for his for training at the famed Le Cordon Bleu.

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By Justin Murphy-Mancini, Organist and Pianist

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I was very glad to share my love of the organ and harpsichord with sometimes-skeptical listeners who heard something new in their sounds. At the same time, I received the gift of reconnecting with the piano in a way I’d not had during my conservatory studies. I’m proud of the many performance and worship services I could contribute to alongside both members and friends of the congregation. Special memories will include the cluster-wide performance of Fauré’s Requiem, this year’s MLK service with Michael Morgan, and the Women’s Choir concerts.

I’ve learned so much from this congregation. The spirit of collaboration here is exceptional and provided a model that I’ll take with me in all my future endeavors. One of my graduate school mentors mentioned recently that I handled a complex rehearsal situation well, and I was able to reply proudly, ‘I learned those skills working at the church!’ I was able to develop new skills by working with the many ensembles here because the church environment encouraged me not to think of myself only as a keyboard player. I’ve been able to think deeply about the way music plays an essential role in worship and in the life of First UU, and how doing this work has provided ever greater degrees of satisfaction.

At the same time, I’m grateful for the many opportunities to continue my development as a musician in other ways. First UU has been very generous in supporting concerts of unusual music, recording projects, and guests I’ve invited to share our spaces. I was humbled by the presence of so many congregation members at my dissertation performance on June 2nd. By the time you read this, I’ll have defended my thesis!

Though I’ll miss this place very much, I’m excited for my next step. I’ll be joining the staff of First Religious Society Unitarian Universalist in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in August. They’re a nearly-300-year-old congregation in a beautiful seaside community north of Boston with a long history of good music-making. I’ll be directing the music program, leading their choir, and playing their organ built in 1834! Please make sure to come visit.

I cannot stress enough how important First UU has been in my life, and hopefully over the next several weeks I can share these feelings with many of you in person. Thank you!
Beloved Conversations

By Jan Garbosky

Last summer’s Town Hall meeting stunned many of us when People of Color (POC) shared the deep hurt they experienced in this, their spiritual home. Since then, becoming a more radically inclusive, anti-racist, anti-oppressive congregation has become central to First Unitarian Universalist Church. The Board, staff, and the Journey Toward Wholeness team.

Part of the work was bringing Beloved Conversations: Meditation on Race & Ethnicity to First UU. Our first group of 31 participants recently ended and we’ve identified dates for our October/November session. Here are a few comments from current POC and non-POC participants:

“As a POC, I appreciated the time and safe space to talk with other POC about the Beloved Conversations topics in a deeper, unguarded and meaningful way (stream released through the pressure valve).”

“From the retreat outward, it has been clear that Beloved Conversations is profound and affecting (spiritual) work... deepening relationships in a convenanted community, recognizing the internal and interpersonal work we each have to do. It gives me hope that the bonds our group is forming can be a grounds for further transformation in our congregation.”

Beloved Conversations has provided me with a... group of church members who are listening to one another with deep caring... giving me a base for growth and the beginning of understanding the complexity of racism in our church, our community, and our country. I was fearful of further divisiveness but am experiencing a growth of trust building with each session. [T]wo hour sessions of active communication: listening and sharing...”

“Beloved Conversations has been a profound experience. The curriculum is amazing in its ability to demonstrate white privilege.”

“The social justice partner panel last weekend made up for all the sacrifices necessary to allot more than six weeks of our lives to this training. The speakers shared profound testimony that moved us all to tears of rage and grief, then motivated me more powerfully than anything else to continue the struggle for justice for all.”

Beloved Conversations provides the opportunity to see privileges we are still blind to and offers a chance to have an open, frank, and judgement-free dialogue, about the impact of our comments and questions made to marginalized friends and members of our church as well as the larger community...

“Racism is becoming more and more real to me. It is pervasive and deeply embedded in me, the institutions I’m a part of, and every aspect of my society. It’s becoming harder and harder to ignore the suffering that results, and the fact that I benefit from that suffering.”

October/November participants attend:

- A **Weekend Retreat** on October 4 (Friday) & 5 (Saturday) led by an experienced Beloved Conversations retreat facilitator
  - Friday – 10/4: 6:00-9:15 pm
  - Saturday – 10/5: 8:30 am-5:00 pm

AND
- **8 (weekly), 2-hour Small Group (10-12/group)** Seminars led by First UU facilitators. We’ve scheduled the seminars on 3 different days of the week: Saturdays (1-3pm), Sundays (7-9pm), and Tuesdays (7-9pm) from the second week in October to the first week in December—with no meetings scheduled Thanksgiving week/weekend.

JTW hopes you’ll consider becoming part of our second group. You can learn more about Beloved Conversations & its impact from the following videos:

- Why Beloved Conversations: https://vimeo.com/66255400
- Bearing Witness Part 2: https://vimeo.com/173618466

Contact Jan Garbosky (jgarbosky@comcast.net) or Steve Howard (steeve4564@icloud.com) with questions and/or to receive an invitation and commitment form for the October/November session.
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Be the Community You Wish to Experience
By Tony Bianca, Interim Religious Education Coordinator

As we spend time during June focused on the theme of “Just Community,” there are several opportunities to help build the community we envision here at First UU.

One way you might help is by giving your time and talent to help lead a Skills Sunday Experience at South Bay. You might remember from last summer at the Hillcrest Campus that Skills Sundays are Sundays when adults offer to share a skill, talent, or special interest with the children for 30-45 minutes during Religious Education time. In the past, individuals have shared a variety of skills like tying knots, sewing, calligraphy, building a bird house, magic tricks, origami, 3-D printing, astronomy, and much more! The best skills are the ones you’re passionate about and that can be translated into concrete tasks that can be practiced. We are not so much looking for “show and tell” as we are “guide and do.” Not sure if your skill translates to a hands-on project for kids? Let’s talk, we can likely find a way! You only need to commit for one Sunday (though you could certainly do more if you have many skills to share) and would need to be at South Bay from 9:15 am – 10:45 am on a Sunday morning. If you’re able to help, contact Tony (tony@firstuuandiego.org) to schedule a Sunday.

You can also help create community at our Hillcrest Campus this summer by joining in our new multi-generational RE experience: “The Conversation, Coffee and Coloring Patio Organization” or “CSPO. CSPO will take place on the Patio between service where tables, chairs, and coloring supplies will be provided for any and all who’d like to attend. You can grab a coffee or snack and join us as we color and talk about whatever’s on our minds. Coloring is a great way for people of all ages to come together and create community across generations. We hope to see you there!

One last way you can help create the kind of community you want to experience at church is to sign up to assist in a Sunday Religious Education class at our Hillcrest Campus. Tony will do all the planning, you just have to show up and help on Sunday. We’ll be doing a variety of community-building activities and crafts throughout the summer and you can sign up to assist on as many or a few Sundays as you’re available. Contact Tony (tony@firstuuandiego.org) if you’re able to assist.

I hope you’ll take one of these opportunities to help create community across generations this summer. We can’t build the kind of community we want without your help.
Just Community
By Rev. Kathleen Owens, Lead Minister

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JuneSermonMessages

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By Rhea Kuhlman

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By Stevie K. Carmody, Intern Minister

On June 11, I’ll be moving on from First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, with the completion of my year of intern ministry here. Moving toward any conclusion can be difficult spiritual work, and I’m finding these last few weeks no different. But most fundamentally, I’m connected with a deep wellspring of gratitude for you all, and for the Spirit that has carried us through these last ten months. The ways you’ve helped me grow, change, ask deep questions, and connect has fundamentally made me a better minister, colleague, and friend. I’ll carry First UU wherever I go next.

I’m always impressed with the way this congregation has championed its intern ministry program. I saw this in the willingness throughout the year for us to experiment in worship together. I saw this in the curiosity you brought to our encounters. I saw this in the wisdom you offered at just the right moments. I saw this in how the Spirit Level Foundation supports the program financially. It’s made a great difference in my time here. I especially want to lift up the amazing work of my intern minister committee: thank you to Dorothy Pearlman, Sue McLeod, Ben Fowler, Liz Jones, Kianna Daizyn, and Noveed Salipour for offering unparalleled guidance and feedback as I learned about parish ministry.

The end of my internship will also mark the end of my pastoral and ministerial relationship with you all, and after General Assembly, I will observe some time when I stay out of regular communication with our First UU community. This mostly is to help ease my own transition and help me focus on what next steps lay ahead. But I’ll send updates about my next steps to the ministers (because they are not all figured out yet!) and they can keep everyone informed.

I do know that on June 12, I’ll begin a long drive to Spokane, WA, where I’ll serve our denomination’s General Assembly Youth Staff. Then I’ll make my way across the northern route of the country, ending up in Queens, NY, where I’ll be living for the foreseeable future. I do know I’ll miss the communities I’ve served—including the South Bay Wisdom Circle, the Young Adult Group, the Campus Ministry Group—very much. My deep gratitude to my colleagues in ministry—Ian, Tania, and Kathleen—and all the wonderful staff that help make this place a joyful working place. Thank you all so much.

In faith,

Stevie K. Carmody

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