



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
COMMUNITY CHURCH  
*of Santa Monica*



**REPORT ON PROGRAMS**

**Fiscal Year**

**July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016**

1260 Eighteenth Street  
Santa Monica, CA 90404

Phone: 310/829-5436  
Fax: 310/998-9181  
E-mail: [office@uusm.org](mailto:office@uusm.org)  
Web: [www.uusm.org](http://www.uusm.org)



# REPORT ON PROGRAMS

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## LEADERSHIP

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**2015-2016**

President .....	Patricia Wright
Vice President.....	Dan Nannini
Secretary.....	Leonard Cachola
Treasurer.....	Kimberly Miller
Past President .....	Cynthia Cottam
Member at Large .....	Joe Engleman
Member at Large .....	Rebecca Crawford
Member at Large .....	Emily Hero
Member at Large .....	Beth Brownlie

**2016-2017**

President .....	To be elected May 22
Vice President.....	To be elected May 22
Secretary.....	To be elected May 22
Treasurer.....	To be elected May 22
Past President .....	Patricia Wright
Member at Large .....	To be elected May 22
Member at Large .....	To be elected May 22
Member at Large .....	Emily Hero
Member at Large .....	Joe Engleman

### STAFF

Minister.....	Rev. Rebecca Benefiel Bijur
Minister Emeritus.....	Rev. Ernie Pipes
Minister Emerita .....	Rev. Judith Meyer
Director of Religious Exploration.....	Catherine Farmer Loya
Summer Minister .....	Nica Eaton-Guinn
Sabbatical Minister .....	Rev. Tera Little
Church Administrator .....	Nurit Gordon
Admin & Finance Assistant .....	Nancy Thompson
Communications & Volunteers Coordinator .....	Jackie Schwab
Director of Music .....	DeReau Farrar
Church Accompanist .....	Daniel Gledhill
Weekday Sexton .....	Kevin Roller
Sunday and Rental Sexton .....	Thomas Ahern
Preschool Teacher .....	Roxanne Coleman-Bell

### NOMINATING COMMITTEE

**2015-2016**

Gretchen Goetz
Rick Rhoads
James Witker
Wendi Gladstone
Beth Rendeiro
Bob Dietz

**2016-2017**

To be elected May 22
To be elected May 22
James Witker
Wendi Gladstone
Beth Rendeiro
Bob Dietz



## MEMBERSHIP

*To become a member of the Church a person shall:*

- Sign a statement of intent to participate as a member in the community life of the Church.
- Reside within the Pacific Southwest District (PSWD) of the Unitarian Universalist Association.
- Be at least 16 years of age or have successfully completed the Church's Coming of Age Program.
- Make a financial contribution of record, or a pledge to do so, to the Church.

Anyone who has been a member of the Church for 40 days is eligible to vote at church business meetings.

Written resignation, failure to make a financial contribution, or moving away from the PSWD area, causes membership to be discontinued.

A "Friend" plays an active role in our community, supports the Church financially, but has chosen not to assume official church membership.



## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION (UUA)

This church is a member of the Unitarian Universalist Association, a voluntary association of autonomous, self-governing local churches and fellowships, and of the Pacific Southwest District of that association.

Information and contact with UUA offices and resources can be obtained at [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org).



## REPORT ON MINISTRY UU COMMUNITY CHURCH OF SANTA MONICA

Rev. Rebecca Benefiel Bijur

*Here in reverence now we gather  
For the blessings we have known  
With a pledge to one another  
That we journey not alone.  
Joy and sorrow make us wise  
Kin to all that lives and dies... Life calls us on!*

— Kendyl Gibbons, “Life Calls Us On”

In my sixth year of settled ministry with our congregation, we have walked together through a time of new possibilities, difficult challenges, and change and transition at 18th and Arizona and beyond. In June, we welcomed Nica Eaton-Guinn as our part-time Summer Minister while the congregation sent me on a three-month maternity leave to welcome my son Benjamin to the world. Please see Nica’s Report on Summer Ministry for details about her exceptional leadership in membership development, right relations, worship arts, and other aspects of her ministry with us.

I returned in late August in time to celebrate Nica’s ordination with many of you at the Unitarian Society in Santa Barbara, and to launch our church year with joyful, festive Ingathering services on the theme of spiritual journeys. The Committee on Ministry and I also completed the year-long preparations that had gone into planning my sabbatical, which began on September 28.

As you know, it is a practice of UU congregations to offer their ministers an extended time of spiritual renewal and study after five years of service, and this fall I was able to accept this generous gift. While on sabbatical, I spent more time with my growing family, traveled to Yosemite and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, and practiced the art of neighborliness in new and life-giving ways. Thank you for your caring investment in your minister’s well being, spiritual growth, and leadership. Many thanks also to Rev. Tera Little for her skillful ministry as our part-time Acting Minister during my sabbatical, including continuing to support our leadership in conflict management, pastoral care, and offering creative and inspiring worship services, including jointly leading Christmas Eve worship services with Rev. Rick Hoyt-McDaniels of First Church Los Angeles.

Since my return to full-time ministry in January, I have worked closely with our Board of Directors and Committee on Ministry to lead a process to better understand and clarify our congregation’s significant concerns about leadership, ministry, and our future together. Please see the report from our Committee on Ministry for more details about that process and the path before us now.

This spring, we will celebrate the completion of DeReau Farrar’s time with us, as we send him to a new full-time position as Acting Director of Music for First Unitarian Church of Portland, Oregon. It

has been an honor to work with DeReau for the past four years and I will miss him greatly. We have begun to search for a new Director of Music to lead this vibrant part of our congregation’s ministry.

It was a delight to officiate for the wedding of Leslie Beauvais and Ed Brand this year, where we sang together the words of Kate Wolf’s song, “Give yourself to love...” as Ed and Leslie gave themselves to their joyful partnership. We remember and are grateful for the lives of those we lost this year: Jessica Fant-Chapin and Ralph Meyer.

I thank you for your commitment to the practice of sharing our non-pledge offering each Sunday with organizations that do what we cannot do on our own. From July 1 to April 24, we gave away 60% of that non-pledge offering, to date over \$11,000, to the following organizations: Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE-LA), Step Up on Second, Camp de Benneville Pines, Community Services Unlimited of South Los Angeles (CSU), Didi Hirsh Mental Health Services, Homeboy Industries, Our House Grief Support, OPCC (Ocean Park Community Center), UU Service Committee, UU Animal Ministry, Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), UU James Reeb Fund for Multicultural Ministries and Leadership and Black Lives of UU, UU Pacific Southwest District (PSWD), UU Pacific Western Region (PWR), Westside Food Bank, and WISE and Healthy Aging.

As we walk together into the future, and the vital, difficult work of building right relationship among us, I hope we will be guided by our covenant with one another, and with the larger faith we serve. In the words of my colleague Kendyl Gibbons:

*Words and deeds of those before us  
Waken here to keep us strong  
Blend our voices with the chorus  
Of creations living song  
Courage bids us lift our eyes  
Upward to the shining skies...*

Hope calls us on!

In faith, Rev. Rebecca

## REPORT ON SUMMER MINISTRY 2015

Nica Eaton-Guinn

It was a great honor and pleasure to serve as Summer Acting Minister for UUSM during Rev. Rebecca Benefiel Bijur’s maternity leave. Since the congregation and I had already developed a trusting relationship during my Internship year, I believe we were able to have a fruitful summer ministry.

My contract as a half-time minister included overseeing and leading worship, pastoral care, Board work, supervision of staff and newsletter preparation. In addition, I offered some consulting on membership and guidance towards right relations; I assisted the District Executive, Rev. Dr. Ken Brown, during his visit; and I helped Cassandra Christensen develop her end-of-life workshops.

**Worship:** I oversaw the preparation for worship. The well attended services ran smoothly, with quality content and music, led by guest ministers, congregants and myself.

**Pastoral Care:** I met with about 20 people addressing pastoral care issues. I also had one visit with a congregant in the ICU, and spoke to several members on extended phone calls.

**Staff Supervision:** The staff is excellent and needed little supervision. DeReau and Catherine were away some of the time. DeReau worked in the office only on Sundays. We communicated by phone and email to prepare for Sunday services. Nurit, Nancy,

Jackie and I stayed in close contact in person and via phone and email.

**Membership Forum:** I suggested convening a membership forum. 20 people attended including the Board President. The main conclusion was that more attention to the development of membership would be beneficial. This can happen through growing and supporting the Membership Committee, as well as having someone on staff focused on Membership. Jackie Schwab now has 4 extra hours per week to focus on membership. Olga Felton emerged as the new Membership Chair and will work with Jackie.

#### **OBSERVATIONS**

##### **Strengths:**

UUSM has many strengths, including a vibrant, committed community with many ideas and talents and a high level of volunteer involvement. Many people have been here for years and care deeply about this community. There are a wealth of programs and activities.

Worship is consistently strong, engaging and varied, with a professional level music program. This attracts many visitors each week.

The Religious Exploration program is one of the best and largest in Southern California. Led by strong committees, volunteer curriculum writers, and Catherine Farmer-Loya's thoughtful guidance, this program is robust, diverse and provides real appeal for families attending UUSM.

An active social justice emphasis enables UUSM to make a huge difference in the wider community and enhances UUSM's visibility.



##### **Challenges:**

- Amidst the many deeply caring congregants there is a sizeable group who express their concerns in less respectful ways. There can be an atmosphere of criticism, judgment and power play between members, which leads to a combative climate.

- Some congregants seem to believe that everyone should know everything that's going on, as they might in a pastoral size church (fewer than 100). This is not feasible for a program-sized church like UUSM. Developing greater trust between the congregation and the Board would reduce the need for everyone to know everything.

- Some members are concerned about the lack of membership growth. My sense is that this is in large part to do with the fact that there does not appear to be a clear path to membership. There are plenty of visitors, but they need to be guided to deepening engagement..

##### **Recommendations:**

- Develop a covenant of good relations and create a healthy relations team to serve as mediators. The covenant would create a congregationally led and upheld way of being with one another, so that peers could hold one another accountable for speaking with

respect and talking with one another directly about issues.

- Have as much reporting on meetings, town halls, Board gatherings, workshops and committee decisions as possible in the newsletter and/or on the web, so that those who want to know what's going on can inform themselves.

- The Board and/or the Committee on Ministry hold regular forums, and perhaps staff a table on Sundays, at which members' concerns could be addressed.

- Have clear lines of authority and be specific about who has leadership for what. Move toward a policy governance style model, so that the Board will not have to handle minutiae and can focus on the overall health and vision of the congregation.

- Develop a compelling vision of how UUSM is in service to the world, which may help galvanize people towards a unifying goal that is more important than some of the other things people get embroiled in. Although there are plenty of social justice initiatives, having an overall, engaging vision for why the congregation gathers might help bring people together from disparate special interest groups to a sense of congregational unity.

- Develop a set of steps guiding newcomers to membership.

After visitors attend the Newcomer Orientation, I suggest a Getting Acquainted/Getting to Know Us class which would provide a tour of the facilities and history of the congregation, that Catherine or someone from RE & Membership could lead every other month. Following that, newcomers could attend a Path to Membership class, offered quarterly, which goes more deeply into UU history, explains membership and its benefits and gives people an opportunity to become members. As part of these classes, newcomers could be matched with programs that might be of special interest to them, and could also be introduced to members who have similar interests and concerns.

I depart with great fondness and gratitude to UUSM, the Board, the COM and Rev. Rebecca Benefiel Bijur. I leave you with a heavy heart at having to say goodbye and great gratitude for our time together. UUSM and all its amazing people will always hold a special place in my heart. Thank you for the opportunity to serve this congregation over this past year.

## **DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION (DRE)**

*Catherine Farmer Loya*

We have a Religious Exploration program to be proud of here at UUSM! This year has been very focused on curriculum development. This includes the Spirit Seekers K-2nd class developed by Sabina Mayo-Smith which focused on themes from our church covenant this year, the science-based UUniverse Story class for 3rd-5th graders which explored biology and our connection to all life on earth this year, and the Interfaith Quest for 6th-7th grades which explored eastern and indigenous faith traditions. At 11am we offered a multi-age elementary class that focused more broadly on exploring UU values and traditions; this class was small, with an average attendance of 5 kids ranging mostly from K-4th grades, but was a successful experiment in differentiating the 9am and 11am programs in recognition of the very different enrollment levels at each service. In the next year, the RE program for elementary and middle schoolers will focus on exploring and deepening our UU identity and values, making good use of high quality curricula developed by the UU Association. This year was also the final year of the 9am 8th grade Coming of Age program model, as we are moving to an alternating-years model of offering the Our Whole Lives sexuality education program and



the Coming of Age program for 8th-9th graders. In 2016-17, O.W.L. will be offered, and COA will come around again in 2017-18. The YRUU youth group for high schoolers continues to be large and vibrant, with more than 15 youth regularly attending on Sunday mornings. The group is looking forward to their trip to Yosemite in July. We also have a vibrant adult program offered throughout the year, and I especially enjoyed co-facilitating the Building Your Own Theology class this spring.

Our Whole Lives is a very important element of our educational ministry, and I am very proud that we are a congregation that offers five levels of the O.W.L. lifespan sexuality education program! This is thanks to the long-term dedication and organization of O.W.L. coordinator Beth Rendeiro. This year, we offered 5th-6th Grade O.W.L., Kindergarten-1st Grade O.W.L., and the first half of the Adult O.W.L. program. These classes call for a special commitment of time from teachers, participants and their families. Next year, 8th-9th (Jr. High) and 10th-12th (Sr. High) O.W.L. classes will be offered.

My role in Sunday morning worship this year included leading Intergenerational services for Ingathering, Day of the Dead, the Winter Pageant and Blessing of the Animals, a family-focused Christmas Eve service as well as our traditional 6pm service, and supporting our youth-led YRUU, Coming of Age and Bridging services. In June we'll conclude our program year with an all-church Celebration Sunday, recognizing the many gifts of time and self that volunteers in all areas of church life give to our community.

The nature of the DRE position necessitates an overlapping of many tasks with various people in our congregation to create and run our RE program, and to provide leadership in our community. It has been a wonderful gift to serve as the Director of Religious Education for this congregation for the last 13 years. I feel certain that the RE program will continue to be a leading edge for vibrant, meaningful participation in our beloved community for many years to come, thanks to the dedication of the many UUSM members who give their time and passion in support of our lifespan RE programs.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

*Patricia Wright*

I have divided my report into the year's highlights and some of my reflections on the year and its challenges.

**Highlights:** I had the privilege of working with three ministers this year – with Nica Eaton-Guinn as our summer minister, with Tera Little as our sabbatical minister, and with Rev. Rebecca during the month of September and upon her return in January following her sabbatical. I also had the privilege and challenge (?) of cooking vegetarian, gluten-free, and vegan during two years of Board meetings, as a gift to the staff and the Board.

One of the most rewarding highlights of the year was General Assembly in Portland, OR from June 24-28. Twenty-three members of our congregation attended, the most ever, with diverse interests so we could fan out to different workshops and bring back our impressions and ideas shared at our “Ponderings on Tap” or simply crossing paths along the way.

Another highlight was the workshop on “Connecting our Community through Listening and Talking Compassionately with One Another” that was jointly sponsored by the Board and the Committee on Ministry, and facilitated by Mary Mackenzie. The more than 60 attendees were engaged and enthused. Social hour after church Sunday morning was abuzz with reflections and enthusiasm for what we learned and experienced.

Following three Town Halls and several years of diligent effort, the work of the Committee on Money (CoS) came to fruition with the congregation's approval of the joint recommendations of the CoS and the Board by vote at the 2016 Valentine's Day Congregational Meeting. Six resolutions were passed and the following accounts were ratified: Operating Account (Resolution II), Catastrophe Reserve Account (Resolution III-a), Capital/Building Reserve Account (Resolution III-b), Contingency Reserve Account (Resolution III-c), Deficit Reserve Fund (Resolution III-d), and the establishment of a Church Endowment Fund (Resolution V). Additional resolutions adopted principles, standards, and practices relating to these accounts.

Our annual Board retreat was held on Sept. 12 and out of it came three S.M.A.R.T (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, and Time-bound) goals: A commitment to 1) Right Relations, 2) Openness of Board activity, and 3) Incorporating more of mission and vision into our financial planning.

### Reflections and Challenges:

In December, our Committee on Ministry (CoM) and Rev. Tera Little took brave steps to identify and address the level of conflict within our congregation. The Board unanimously endorsed a proposal to seek outside assistance from the UUA in the form of a Congregational Assessment to be conducted by staff from the Pacific West Region. Those “congregational conversations” took place during the weekend of Feb. 19 leading into Monday, Feb. 22. The UUA Region's report was received by the Board on March 9 and a Town Hall facilitated by Rev. Ken Brown followed on March 20. The pews were packed and many, many people passionately spoke their truths. We have since contracted with Nancy Edmundson to help bring our congregation into Right Relations.

Rev. Ken Brown conducted a Governance Workshop on July 11, but our commitment to the exploration of governance will have to wait. What comes of governance and what might be the most suitable for the health and sustainability of our congregation lies perhaps in our future, but my hopes remain.

### Statement of 12 Wishes for UCCSM

1. Inspired, energized leadership focused on UCCSM mission.
2. Clear policies that allow Board, staff, volunteers, and congregation to own and act on their responsibility, power, and authority to make decisions.
3. A mission-based budget that reflects UCCSM's deepest values and aspirations as a community.
4. Increased participation and leadership from volunteers who have freedom to move forward with good ideas, and are freed up to do the good work they want to do.
5. Clarity of authority, responsibility, and accountability, especially for what decision-making belongs to Board, Minister, Church Administrator, staff, and committees.
6. Improved ability to manage and navigate conflict and

disagreement with dignity, compassion, and respect.

7. A clear appeals process and a clear end to the appeals process when a decision is challenged.

8. Increased focus by Board and staff on responsibilities that are truly theirs—the work only the Board or staff can do.

9. Increased ability of leaders to focus on the future and the possibilities and potential rewards of change.

10. Service as a Board member as energizing, fun, inspiring, and transformative; a wait list of qualified, interested volunteers.

11. Organized, comprehensive, broad policies that are defined and redefined as needed.

12. Efficient decision-making.

## CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR REPORT

*Nurit Gordon*

**Facility:** This past fiscal year we kept upgrading our facility and completed quite a few projects.

The Audio Video project was completed, as budgeted, and we now have an upgraded and improved sound system, a new pull down screen on the pulpit and a projector in a permanent location in the Sanctuary.

The Sanctuary Lighting project phase one and two were successfully completed. The Sanctuary was rewired and the last phase will be completed soon with the installation of all the fixtures and the controls. This project will be completed within our budget and we can already see some savings in our electricity bill. The Garden of Eternity Project was completed this year as well. Thanks to the generous contribution from member Ray Goodman and a matching grant from the Spirit Level Foundation, the Garden of Eternity was established this year. Our side yard looks more beautiful than ever. Some of the memorial bricks have already been installed and the rest will be installed later during the year. The brick orders provide additional income to the church and we hope to receive additional orders each year for an annual installation. The income from the Memorial Bricks purchases this year was \$11,965.

We purchased fifty new chairs, since we were short on quantity, which are used in Forbes classrooms.

In addition to the Facility Upgrades, routine maintenance was performed, including carpet cleaning, window washing, pipes snaking, tree trimming, and fire extinguishers inspection etc.

We had to replace our two skylights in the Sanctuary after they were blown away during one of the rainstorms this year.

We removed the grass and installed decomposed granite in the Anderson Courtyard.

We are currently working on a new church sign installation for Arizona and 18th.

**Finance:** I have been providing the monthly finance reports to the Finance Committee, Board reports to the Board, including membership reports, GC reports and attendance reports.

I worked with the Treasurer to create the 2016-17 budget proposal, after contacting all the departments and staff members for their proposed budget.

I worked with the President to create the Annual Meeting mailer and ballots which is currently a work in progress.

I am working with our Communications Coordinator and member Carol Ring to create the Annual Reports on Programs.

The office staff assisted and supported all other congregational meetings and town hall meetings, including the Committee on Money related meetings and helped prepare reports and materials. I was asked to provide numerous reports to different members

including historical data of attendance, Generous Congregation, finances and Membership which took a big chunk of my time this year.

We changed our Employment Development Department status from self-insured to tax-rated.

We are still self-insured for three years after applying to be tax-insured. According to the EDD, CA unemployment insurance code the “reimbursable” employer shall remain liable for potential employment insurance benefits charges for 3 more years after termination.

Our self-insured status will end January 1st 2019.

This year we hired a new RE staff member and are currently in search of a new Director of Music.

### UCCSM snapshot as of May 2, 2016

Total membership: 336

2016 pledges: \$119,419

D4\$ income: \$32,816

Generous Congregation Contributions: \$11,045

Generous Congregation income: \$5746

Average Sunday attendance: 173



## NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Nominating Committee is written into our bylaws as a way of selecting nominees for positions up for election to the Board of Directors and the Nominating Committee at the Annual Meeting. Positions that are up for election include termed-out and not-continuing Board of Directors and Nominating Committee members. This year, that included the following six Board of Directors positions:

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- 2 Members at Large

The committee also sends recommendations for members to a few other committees, subject to board ratification. This year, that included recommendations for the Investment, Finance and Personnel Committees.

We met monthly for the entire year. We discussed the qualities that we should look for in filling board positions and what procedures we should use. Our criteria for picking board members emphasized finding leaders who have a long range vision for our church that creates a growing community helping individuals with their spiritual growth, helping give our children a good start on life, helping our church set its priorities, giving everyone a voice, and helping us thrive and interact with the wider world. To accomplish these aspirations we looked for potential Board Members who:

- are active in the church,



- tend to attend services,
- are able to express their ideas clearly,
- are able to work effectively with a wide variety of people,
- can handle conflict and are able to understand a larger picture than their own,
- can inspire members to take an active role,
- make a financial contribution that is meaningful to them,
- and are excited by the UU beliefs and communicate excitement about them to others.

**What were your greatest accomplishments and challenges?**

This has been a complex and divisive year for our church. Our greatest accomplishment was our committee’s ability to work well together during our lengthy and involved search, and to find candidates who met our criteria and had the time and motivation to take on board responsibilities during this complicated period. We sought advice from UUA leaders, Rev. Tera Little and Ken Brown (our UUA regional representative). We communicated with our church community about our process via eblast and our church newsletter. We read and reread the bylaws. Although there were differing points of view within our committee, we felt good about our work together.

**What are your goals in 2016?**

Our committee of six will include four continuing and two new members next year. The goals will be similar to this year – to continue to create a balanced and visionary Board of Directors, who can work together on behalf of us all, creating a healthy and growing church community.

**What resources do you need to accomplish this goal?**

The most important resource is a Board of Directors working together as a team – and a thriving and engaged church community.

Committee members: Beth Rendeiro, Bob Dietz, Gretchen Goetz (chair), James Witker, Rick Rhoads, Wendi Gladstone



**COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY REPORT**

*Rev. Rebecca Benefiel Bijur, Sue Stoyanoff, Co-chair, Tom Peters, Co-chair, Margot Page, and Leon Henderson-MacLennan*

Last May, Margot Page and Leon Henderson-MacLennan accepted appointments to The Committee on Ministry (CoM), joining Co-Chairs Sue Stoyanoff and Tom Peters as congregant representatives. Barbara Kernochan joined the CoM for the summer and fall. We thanked Kris Langabeer and Alan Brunell for their service on the CoM as they both completed their terms.

We were happy to welcome Rev. Nica Eaton-Guinn as Acting Minister during Rev. Rebecca’s maternity leave. Nica had served as our Intern Minister during the previous church year, and we were delighted to continue her time with us during the summer. She met

with the CoM during our monthly meetings, providing insight and thoughtful guidance as conflict and unhappiness among those in our church community continued.

Shortly thereafter CoM reiterated its Statement of Purpose (adopted December 2014): The Committee on Ministry will (1) Encourage direct communication between members and the minister and staff; (2) Educate itself and the congregation about carrying out effective ministry; (3) Communicate with members and visitors to understand their vision for the church; (4) Assess the state of ministry in the congregation; (5) Empower the congregation to fulfill the church’s mission; (6) Be a model of good relations; (7) Report regularly to the board with recommendations for improving the entire ministry of the congregation; (8) Support the minister in her professional development; and (9) Meet monthly, or as needed.

Rev. Rebecca returned from maternity leave for the month of September, during which she connected briefly with the congregation and met with the CoM. As she embarked on her Sabbatical Leave in October, we welcomed Rev. Tera Little who served as Acting Minister through December.

In October, the CoM and the Board sponsored a Compassionate Communication workshop facilitated by Mary Mackenzie, an expert in compassionate communication. The day-long workshop, held on Saturday, October 3, was well attended and most experienced it as a valuable experience. We were introduced to concepts of self empathy, empathy for another person, differentiating between needs and feelings, and asking for what you want in a positive way.

During Rev. Tera’s time with our congregation, she noted that ours is a congregation in a high level of conflict and unhappiness, and in December she recommended that we immediately seek the assistance of our Regional UUA Congregation Life Staff. In December the CoM and Rev. Tera initiated conversations with Ken Brown, our Regional Lead. He recommended that we convene Congregational Conversations—focus groups designed to ask open-ended questions about how we feel about our church. The CoM believed these conversations were a necessary step for our community, based on where we were at that time. The Board unanimously approved the plan.

December was a time of transitions. Barbara Kernochan completed her time with the CoM and we were grateful to her for her service. We also thanked Rev. Tera for her enthusiastic and wise guidance as she completed her Acting Ministry with us. And on January 3, we welcomed Rev. Rebecca home from her sabbatical leave.

In January, we moved forward with planning for the Congregational Conversations, and the focus groups were held at church from February 20 through February 22. Our goal was to move toward more inclusion, open communication, compassion and health to better understand how we as a community feel about our church. More than 170 of us participated. The focus groups were facilitated by 7 UUA ministers, 3 of whom are Regional Congregational Life Staff. A CoM member was present during each group and took detailed notes which were shared with Regional staff. A church member assisted with assisting attendees as they arrived, directing them to the room for their group. As the end of each group session, the CoM distributed an Exit Survey designed to gauge the experience of attendees.

With regard to the Exit Survey, CoM asked 2 questions: (1) Did you have a chance to express what you came to discuss? (2) Did you feel heard in your session? 159 people returned surveys. Of those, 151 answered “yes” to both questions, and 8 answered “no” to at least one question. Of those who said “yes”, 61 provided comments,

and all of those who answered “no” provided comments.

The CoM received the published Report on the Community Conversations by Ken Brown (Compiled and edited by Jan Christian, Jonipher Kwong, Anne Hines, Tera Little, Maggie Yenoki, Ken Brown and Nancy Bowen) in mid-March. After initial review by the CoM, Ken Brown distributed the report to the Board, and a joint meeting of the CoM, the Board and Ken Brown was held to discuss the report and its recommendations. The full text of the Report is found in the Appendix.

Its findings and recommendations were:

**1. The purpose, vision and mission of the congregation did not appear to inform the Community Conversations**

- a. Not evident at the sessions was reference to common cause that deserves loyalty above personal satisfaction
- b. Although such may exist, it did not provide the unifying themes needed in a healthy midsize congregation

**2. Going forward, the UUSM needs to consider**

- a. Identifying core values of the congregation
- b. Naming the purpose for which we are gathered in community
- c. Write or review the vision and mission statements
- d. Use all of this communal information for leadership, decision making, and inspiration to build the congregation.

**3. To address these shortcomings of UUSM the Board should work with Regional Staff to bring in consultants able to work with the congregation to clarify roles, responsibility and authority**

**4. UUSM’s adaptive challenge may be learning to be a religious community, unified in purpose and mission despite differing theological identification, worship preferences, life experiences and gifts; UUSM should consider:**

- a. Training in compassionate communication
- b. Developing processes for addressing conflict constructively
- c. Small Group Ministries to build spiritual friendship across differences
- d. Adult faith formation exploring the range of Unitarian Universalist identity

**5. The Board of Trustees and Rev. Rebecca Benefiel Bijur should consider the best way to complete her ministry with the congregation**

**6. A multi-year, highly trained interim minister familiar with post-conflict healing, learning and change should be brought on.**

On March 20, a Town Hall Meeting, facilitated by Ken Brown, was held to discuss the Report on the Congregational Conversations.

The CoM reviewed the history that led to the Conversations, and reminded attendees how we as a community had come to this place. The CoM expressed its deep sadness with the recommendations, and reminded everyone that it’s important to remember that the recommendations are just that – recommendations about how we might move forward as a community. CoM expressed its desire that all remember that we all love UUSM, and that we can work together to bring healing to our broken community as we continue the hard work of speaking our own truths while affirming the worth of each person’s truth. CoM said that it’s important that we treat each other with respect and compassion today and as we move forward in the coming months.

The great majority of congregants who spoke at the Town Hall meeting supported Rev. Rebecca, and demonstrated a willingness to work on resolution. It became clear that most of our community do not want Rev. Rebecca to leave her ministry with us. The CoM supports the continuing ministry of Rev. Rebecca and recognizes the importance of honoring all voices as we move forward with the important work ahead. A summary of the Town Hall meeting

written by Lois Hutchinson was published in the May 2016 issue of the Church Newsletter.

Following the Town Hall, the Board worked with Ken Brown to identify next steps, and the Board initiated work with Nancy Edmundson, a consultant who will guide us through the next steps to a healthier congregation as Rev. Rebecca continues her ministry with us.

This was a year of many transitions and internal conflict at our church. The CoM will continue to work to develop open, respectful relationships within our church community and to facilitate the fulfillment of our church’s ministry. We welcome open communication with all of our church members. In addition to speaking with any of us by phone or after services on Sunday, you may reach us by email at [committeeonministry@uusm.org](mailto:committeeonministry@uusm.org).

Respectfully,

Committee on Ministry

Rev. Rebecca Benefiel Bijur, Sue Stoyanoff, Co-chair, Tom Peters, Co-chair, Margot Page, and Leon Henderson-MacLennan  
May 2016



## THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

*Denise Helton*

The Personnel Committee met regularly throughout the past year to address the various personnel issues and challenges that arose. Up until very recently, it was a stable year with the only changes in personnel being in the nursery caregiver area. However, in March 2016, DeReau Farrar, our Director of Music (DOM), let us know that he will be leaving his position at the end of June to begin a new position at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Portland, Oregon. As of the writing of this report, we have posted several ads and are receiving resumes. We plan to interview candidates in mid to late May with the intent of hiring a DOM to begin in early August, in time to meet with the choir and prepare for the new church year. Also, our hope is that the new DOM will be able to have some transitional training with DeReau before he leaves us in late June.

We have worked closely with and in support of Reverend Rebecca and all staff members of the church on personnel issues as they arose. As the year comes to a close, our committee is comprised of the following members: Garland Alan, Barbara Kernochan, and Denise Helton, who serves as Chair.

## TREASURER/FINANCE REPORT

Kim Miller

### Overall responsibilities of Treasurer and Finance Committee:

I became treasurer in May of 2015. The Treasurer is required to have a fiduciary responsibility to the Church and oversee the financial condition of our community. This past year, I strived to meet the high bar set by our last two treasurers (Alan Brunell and Kit Shaw). The work includes assisting and responding to our Administrative Director, Nurit Gordon, regarding any requests in our accounting as well as a monthly detailed review of the Church's financial statements and accounts with the Finance Committee. The Treasurer prepares for the monthly Finance Committee meetings, sets the agenda, and prepares any written materials. (Finance routinely meets on the Sunday immediately prior to the board meeting.) I also provide monthly written reports to the Board and respond to requests for information and support from our Church community pertaining to budget, spending, finance or other matters.

### Review of deficit spending and budgeting:

In May of 2015, we faced a 5 plus year practice of deficit spending and we had again approved a deficit budget of more than \$50,000 for the 2015/16 fiscal year. Our community was and is concerned about the sustainability of continuing this practice, and with such concern in mind, Finance commenced reviewing the annual budget of the Church which was approved at the May 2015 budget meeting and worked all year to consider how to reduce or eliminate this deficit.

### Committee on Money resolutions:

Our Congregation passed a motion at the May 2015 annual meeting setting a vote on the Committee on Money ("CoS") recommendations by Feb 2016, as to how to handle our unique large bequests. The motion also mandated that finance was to review the CoS report and make recommendations to the board and congregation. Finance began this review in June of 2015 and in August of 2015 finance recommended the CoS recommendations "in principle." Finance also calculated the amount of the bequest funds that were left (after prior expenditures were authorized and spent by our community) in order to assess what our actual financial reserves were and worked along with the CoS, at their request, through the fall and up to February of 2016 when the CoS resolutions overwhelmingly passed.

### Proposed Budget for 2016/2017:

Our community made it very clear that we do not want to continue with our pattern of deficit spending and we need to work together to balance our income and our expenses, and we keep that in mind while preparing our 2016/17 budget proposal. (Finance may only propose a budget. It is then sent to the Board for approval in April of each year and finally to the congregation to approve at our annual meeting.) Finance and myself sought to be inclusive and collaborative with our community this year in drafting our budget proposal and hope to continue that practice in the future. We reached out to every department and had either personal or telephonic meetings to discuss the upcoming budget to get input starting in January of 2016.

This resulted in a "Finance/ Budget Town Hall" on April 10, 2016, which was attended by approximately 70 congregants. The draft 2016/17 budget was presented with a summary and power point done by Vilma Ortiz. We received additional input from our community and went back and edited our proposed budget further based on that input.

Finance Committee members Steve White and Vilma Ortiz did

a numeric and statistical assessment of our current and present pledge/income history for the past 5 to 8 years, with the goal to get an accurate assessment of income projections for the next year. The good news is that, despite a significant drop in our membership, our pledge income has held virtually steady for the past five years, which means that our community is giving more per member. However, the other side of that analysis is that our pledge and other income is not increasing overall. This information helped Finance draft our proposed budget for 2016/17 which still includes a deficit of slightly less than \$20,000.00 but is "moving in the right direction."

Due to the fact that we now have financial reserves set aside for our endowment, and the other "funds" (pursuant to the CoS resolutions), an Investment Committee was appointed by the Nominating Committee and they have begun to analyze investment recommendations to the Board.

### Goals:

Our goals for the coming year are to continue to refine and work with our bookkeeping accounting program to clarify information. We would like to obtain the outside services of a CPA (preferably through directed donations) to audit our financial practices. If this can not be accomplished then we will ask a group of qualified members or persons (probably in an exchange with another UU Church) to do an audit in the upcoming year.

Finance would like to institutionalize holding two Town Hall meetings a year — one in the fall (early November) and then another one in the spring (March) to inform and to get input from and answer questions from our community as to the budget, finance and expenses prior to the annual budget presentation to the Board in April. This year we provided ongoing contact information to be available to answer or respond to our community's concerns regarding finance and budget and we hope to continue this practice as well. (Kim Miller; kmillerlaw@aol.com).

Finance is considering ways that it might support further fund raising and income efforts at our church and noted that for example this year our deficit is \$20,000 and pledge income is anticipated at approximately \$390,000. If, on average, our members increased their pledge by 10 percent we could eliminate the deficit and have extra funds to support programs and services. Finance Committee members Kit Shaw and Kim Miller also serve on the Pledge Team to support the "income side" of the budget.



### Thank you:

I thank Nurit Gordon as well as the Finance Committee members this past year for their help and hard work: Current members: Alan Brunell, Kit Shaw, Steve White, Steven DePaul, Vilma Ortiz and prior Finance Committee members who were on the committee this past year: Charles and Christine Haskell, Abby Arnold, and Jacki Weber.

## PLEDGE TEAM

*Pledge Team members: Barbara Gibbs, Abby Arnold, Beth Brownlie, Jacki Weber, Kit Shaw, Gretchen Goetz, Patricia Wright, Kim Miller, Olga Felton, Rev. Rebecca Benefiel Bijur, Rev. Tera Little*

**Overview and Strategy:** The Pledge Team continued the work we started during the 2015 pledge drive. Members of the Pledge Team agreed to (1) improve our skills and knowledge about raising funds for sustaining and growing church programs; (2) focus on those who feel positive about our church; (3) strive to communicate with members of the congregation throughout the year, not just at pledge time; (4) work to integrate church leaders into the work of building a culture of giving; and (5) offer acknowledgement and recognition to all who support the annual pledge drive. The Pledge Team recognized that there was a countervailing campaign to encourage members to reduce their pledges to the General Fund, and to donate instead to specific church programs.

**Education:** Several team members attended General Assembly in June and went to workshops to learn about successful (and unsuccessful) pledge drive strategies in other Unitarian Universalist congregations throughout the U.S. Three members also completed the Annenberg Alchemy Training, offered by invitation to selected nonprofit organizations each year. The entire team read the book "Making the Annual Pledge Drive Obsolete" by Michael Durall and Timothy Dombek.

**2016 Pledge Drive Plan:** The Pledge Team adopted a plan based on a successful pledge increase drive in the Eugene, Oregon UU congregation. The plan included the following elements:

1. The goal is to encourage members to make a contribution that is meaningful to them, in alignment with the UUA generous giving guidelines. To encourage people to increase their pledges, the Pledge Team used its budget to create an incentive system benefitting the Westside Food Bank. If a pledge was submitted by December 1, the Food Bank received \$5. If the person pledged a 3% increase, the Food Bank received \$10. If the increase was 15%, the Food Bank received \$15. Of those who returned a pledge card, 64 increased their pledge, 28 decreased their pledge, and 63 pledged the same as the previous year. There were six new pledgers. Those who did not return their pledge cards but were still members of the church had their pledge rolled over from 2015.

2. Members and friends were invited to attend one of nine house parties, which they selected themselves. Each house party used a set program of chalice lighting, songs, and discussion about what is meaningful about church membership. Each attendee was given an envelope with a pledge form, and asked to complete it then or soon. Of the over 50 people who attended these house parties, at least 15 increased their pledge, and only two decreased their pledge. (Data not yet obtained for some attendees.)

3. Team members followed up with church members to invite them to the house parties, and to make sure the pledge forms were returned. We also contacted members who had not fulfilled their 2015 pledges to remind them that their funds were due, and to listen to them about any barriers they may have had to fulfilling their pledge.

4. Each Sunday in November, a pledge testimony was made from the pulpit during the Sunday service. We asked the speakers to talk about why and how they make their pledge amount meaningful.

5. We had a strong program of donor acknowledgement. Each person who returned a pledge form received a written thank-you

note from the Pledge Team and a phone call from a church board member. In the December, January and February newsletters, a complete list of pledge respondents was listed.

**Results of the Pledge Drive:** The 2016 pledge drive ended with pledges from 269 households, with a total of \$391,367 pledged. The Westside Food Bank will receive \$1,425 of a possible \$2,000 allocated by the Pledge Team.

**Next Steps:** Considering that there was an active campaign to decrease pledging, and that we had two interim ministers during the year, the Pledge Team is pleased with the results. As a group that is dedicated to continuous learning, we are discussing ways to refine our strategies to increase pledging over the next five years, and are carefully analyzing the results of our activities. Most team members are inspired by the Durall/Dombek book about meaningful giving, and we are discussing ways that we can bring a culture of generous pledging into our church.

### Pledge drive results, 2016 v. 2015

	2016	2015
Amount pledged	\$391,367	\$392,880
Number of households	269	274
Average pledge per household	\$1,454.90	\$1,433.87
Number increasing pledge amount	64	55
Number decreasing pledge amount	28	19
Number same as previous year pledge	63	42
New pledgers	6	15
Rollover	108	143



## LIFESPAN RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION

Religious exploration is a lifelong learning process, and the Lifespan Religious Exploration committee oversees program offerings designed to appeal to UUSM members and visitors of all ages. The Lifespan RE Committee is an umbrella committee which includes the Children/Youth Committee and the Adult Programs Committee. Under the direction and guidance of Catherine Farmer Loya, our Director of Religious Education, each subcommittee meets once a month to brainstorm, plan, and organize programs.

Our visibility in the church continues to be enhanced by the presence of a weekly table in Forbes Hall staffed by committee members who answer questions about our programs and help with registration for classes. It's also a place where members of the congregation can voice opinions and make suggestions for new activities. Please continue reading for more details about the UUSM's programs for children, youth, and adults.

## LIFESPAN RE: CHILDREN & YOUTH COMMITTEE

*Liza Cranis, Sabina Mayo-Smith, Jo An Peters, Kim Santiago-Kalmanson and Nalani Santiago-Kalmanson*

The 2015-16 program year has been one of growth and exploration for the children's RE program, continuing last year's focus on new or revised curricula in most of our classes. The program is made possible by more than 40 UUSM members who volunteer their time as teachers, assistants, event helpers, committee members and more.

Preschoolers took part in a curriculum called "We Are Many, We Are One" with staff preschool teacher Roxanne Coleman-Bell. Kindergarten-2nd graders took part in a curriculum written by UUSM member Sabina Mayo-Smith, which focused on exploring themes drawn from our congregation's covenant (Love, Truth, Service, Peace, Knowledge, Freedom, Covenant) and helping children make meaning of their lives, grow a strong UU identity, and create a spiritual community together that honors multiple learning styles and celebrates beauty in diversity. And we offered the second year of our "UUniverse Story" curriculum for 3rd-5th grades, a hands-on, science-based curriculum organized around the overarching question, "How do we know what we know?" Class sessions took participants outward and into the very very small world of biology, extracting DNA from strawberries, examining our own cheek cells under a microscope, comparing the bones in our hands with those of many other animals, and celebrating all that we see when we look closely at ourselves and the larger world we inhabit.

Middle schoolers took part in the second year of our new "Interfaith Quest" curriculum, which takes participants outside of our own walls to learn about the world's religions through building relationships with our neighbors from other religious traditions. Beginning with a focus on our own UU faith tradition, the focus for the rest of the year was on Asian, indigenous and earth-based religions. Trips included visits to the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Hindu Temple in Chino Hills, the Venice Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, and the Guru Ram Das Sikh Ashram.

The Coming of Age program for 8th graders provided



opportunities for youth to learn who they are and where they are on their spiritual journey as well as articulate their own personal beliefs within the context of our UU faith, in partnership with their Coming of Age advisors and mentors. The program culminates on Coming of Age Sunday, May 15, with the presentation of the youth's credo statements to the congregation and a special Coming of Age ceremony. This is the final year of the current COA program model; in 2016-17 we will offer the Our Whole Lives

sexuality education class for 8th-9th graders, and Coming of Age will return for 8th-9th graders in 2017-18.

The YRUU (Young Religious Unitarian Universalists) group for 9th-12th graders engaged teens in exploring what it means to be young and UU, how our UU principles inform how we live our lives, and what power young UU's have to change the world. YRUU also took part in social justice projects, social gatherings, and led a Sunday worship service for the congregation in April. Our group is large and vibrant, and is currently preparing for this year's youth trip to Yosemite in early July.

We also offered six Faith in Action Sundays this year, engaging children and youth in acts of service to the larger community. Projects included celebrating Earth Day in collaboration with the Green Committee by planting greens in our garden and installing a rain barrel outside the Arizona entrance, sponsoring a month-long Supper Bowl Sundays campaign to raise awareness and funds for the Westside Food Bank, and participating in a beach cleanup with Heal the Bay. We also compiled nearly 100 hygiene kits for donation to OPCC's Shwashlock facility, which provides showers, washers and lockers for those in our Santa Monica community who are homeless.

We are looking forward to a re-visioning of the RE program over the next year, with a focus on our own UU identity and traditions in our classes, as well as a process of engaging the larger UUSM congregation in articulating a vision for our programs for all ages and a renewed volunteer structure to help us bring that vision to life.

## LIFESPAN RE: ADULT PROGRAMS COMMITTEE

*Natalie Kahn, Dan Patterson, Sarah Robson, Beverly Shoenberger, James Witker*

The Adult Programs Subcommittee has worked hard this year to offer a wide array of classes and programs for adults at UUSM. Courses offered this year included "Building Your Own Theology," "The 7 UU Principles and the Palestine-Israel Conflict," a UU History video, two mindfulness meditation classes, a "UU Foundational Texts" series, a book study group on "This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate," talks on Consumerism, and the ongoing ministry theme Patio Chats. Participants in our classes widely represent our UUSM community, including a mix of newcomers as well as longtime members. We find that interest in adult programs is particularly high among people in their first year of engagement with UUSM, and that our offerings are a good way for people to form connections within our church community.

We continue to develop collaborative relationships with other groups and committees at UUSM. We hope to continue to strengthen the bonds of community within our congregation with these kinds of partnerships moving forward.

We look to the congregation for suggestions for future workshops, activities and events. Stop by the LRE Table in Forbes Hall on any Sunday, or contact one of our committee members listed above.

## INVESTMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

In March of this year, the board created the new Investment Committee. This committee will advise the Finance Committee and the board on how and where to invest the money in each of the new funds recommended by the ad hoc Committee on Money and approved by congregational vote. So far, it has advised on the purchase of certificates of deposit (CDs) and explored investment in the mutual fund overseen by the UUA called the UU Common Endowment Fund. A committee charter has also been prepared for approval by the board.

Initial members appointed to the committee are Steven DePaul (co-chair), Jamie Duckworth, Jeff Ellis, and Joe Engleman (co-chair).

## FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (FDC) REPORT

Beth Brownlie and Bryan Oakes are the co-chairs of UU Santa Monica's Facilities Development Committee. Active members include Rev. Rebecca Benefiel Bijur, Cynthia Cottam, Nurit Gordon, Karl Lisovsky, Brad Hutchinson. We have active representation on the board and give reports to the board every two months.

### The FDC provides:

- Advice on maintaining the functionality of all facilities
- Expertise and project management for facility improvement projects large and small
- Proposals to maintain the safety of buildings and outdoor areas for staff, members and rental visitors
- Quick action on occasional needed repairs to buildings and infrastructure
- Research and proposals on sustainability goals for the church community
- Momentum toward a highly sustainable campus through energy and water savings: reducing waste overall along with our carbon footprint.

This year we executed the Sanctuary Lighting Upgrade (SoUL) Project. This includes replacing the antiquated (and potentially hazardous) electrical wiring and upgrading all sanctuary light sources to energy-efficient LED, including a versatile lighting control system with simple user interfaces. We were very thorough and methodical in our approach to this project. Because initial bids for the entire project came in high, we broke the project down into incremental stages. Some of these tasks were highly technical and others were simpler. This allowed multiple vendors to keep costs low, and the project is coming in at or under budget. This strategy also added to the overall timeframe, requiring additional effort from the lead volunteers.

This year we also coordinated replacement of the broken sanctuary skylights, converted the grass in Anderson courtyard to a more sustainable (less water) granite and assisted in the execution of the Memorial Garden project. We have applied to the UUA for Green Sanctuary classification and expect to receive our accreditation in the coming year.

Our goals for 2016-17 include improvements to our buildings, landscape and campus to bring them further in line with our values; particularly our seventh principle, which calls us to be in harmony with the Earth and all living creatures. Our funding model is changing, as well. The proposed operating budget for 2016-17 reduces funding for facilities by 60%. In the future we will draw from the newly established Contingency and Building Reserve funds, as appropriate, to pay for upgrades and repairs.

We are currently seeking a volunteer coordinator to document all durable equipment, building elements and features of the

campus. By assigning a useful life number to these items, along with an estimated replacement cost, we can better understand our financial needs to maintain the building and campus. Beyond housing our beloved community, 13 percent of our average operating income flows from rentals. It behooves us to nurture that income stream.

The FDC plans to work toward the following goals in coming years:

- Upgrade outdoor lighting to LED to make these spaces more enjoyable and safer for our community
- Convert all interior lighting to LED to reduce our energy costs and avoid the environmental hazards of mercury-laden fluorescent bulbs.
- Once our building systems are all converted to the lowest practical energy usage, we plan for solar panels to be installed on Forbes Hall. The goal is to become a Net Zero Energy Building (a mandate of the California building code).
- Improve the indoor air quality of all spaces by placing walk-off mats at main entries, cleaning our carpets and floors more regularly and keeping dust at bay within our spaces.

The committee works well together. All members bring immense experience and expertise to the table, along with a thoughtful, inquisitive approach and deep affection for our communal space. We have worked hard at developing trust in our community through extensive communications: multiple Town Hall meetings, e-blasts and newsletter articles. Project books – detailing budgets, quotes and plans for FDC projects – are available in the office. Our committee, however, seems haunted by ghosts of renovations past. We often meet suspicion, even where our efforts are careful and communicated clearly.

We are always on the lookout for new members to broaden our understanding of the built environment and help us execute projects. We ask that community members let us know about programs and features that would improve our connection to our UU values and improve the overall UU Santa Monica experience.



## HEART TO HEART CIRCLES

Pat Gomez

In 2015 the Small Group Ministry program was renamed "Heart to Heart Circles." This name change reflected what truly happens in this program — participants coming together to share what is on their hearts ± the highs and lows of life and the stories that are deeply personal. The practice of deep listening is a cornerstone of the Heart to Heart Circles, providing a safe space for all to share without being questioned or judged.

In January 2015 Reverend Rebecca led a retreat for new and

returning facilitators. Six new groups consisting of 63 participants began meeting monthly in February 2015 and concluded their monthly meeting with a celebration of the program at the December meetings. Shared readings on the topics of listening, journey, renewal, freedom, spiritual turning points, creativity, forgiveness, letting go, gratitude and faith were the focus of sharing personal stories.

Heart to Heart Facilitators participate in two monthly groups; one as a facilitator and the other as a participant in a group led by Reverend Rebecca. Facilitators learn from one another and practice deep listening and sharing and then bring what they learn to the circles they facilitate.

In addition to meeting monthly all Heart to Heart circles perform two service projects: one for the church community and one for the larger community. The Facilitator Heart to Heart circle also performs one additional service project for the church. Second Sunday Suppers, preparing and serving food at Step Up on Second, picking fruit for the Food Forward project, and refinishing courtyard benches were some of the projects of the 2015 groups.

There were eight Heart to Heart facilitators for the 2015 program. Two of the six groups were led by co-facilitators; four facilitators signed on again for 2016. Four new facilitators joined the program.

2016 again began with a facilitator retreat in early January. Five Heart to Heart circles began meeting in February 2016. Three of the five circles have co-facilitators; a total of 63 participants signed up for the 2016 program. To date the topics explored have been Listening, Transformation and Mortality.

At the close of each program year the Planning Team asks for feedback from participants. Once again, nearly all participants reported that they are better listeners. Many said getting to know others and building relationships is a positive result of Heart to Heart Circles. Survey respondents also noted that Heart to Heart circles taught them “everyone has a story worthy of being heard.” In response to being asked “What have you learned about others by participating in your group?” one participant wrote “that many experiences/feelings are universal; that everyone is dealing with a lot; that there are wonderful people in our church; that this is a very special way to get to know people.”

Thank you to Reverend Rebecca for her leadership of this program. And thanks to the Planning Teams and Facilitators:

**2015:** Reverend Rebecca (Planning Team and Facilitator), Catherine Farmer Loya (Planning Team), Bettye Barclay (Planning Team and Facilitator), Pat Gomez (Planning Team and Facilitator), Rhonda Peacock (Planning Team and Facilitator), Margot Page, JoAn Peters, Kevin Squires, Carrie Lauer, Phillip Bonacich (Facilitators).

**2016:** Reverend Rebecca (Planning Team and Facilitator), Catherine Farmer Loya (Planning Team and Facilitator), Pat Gomez (Planning Team and Facilitator), Rhonda Peacock (Planning Team and Facilitator), Abby Arnold, Denise Helton, JoAn Peters, Margot Page, Andrea Steffan (Facilitators).

And thanks to Nancy Thompson for administrative support.

## FAITH IN ACTION COMMISSION

*James Witker and Rick Rhoads, co-chairs*

The work of the Faith in Action Commission (FIA) is primarily carried out by the committees under FIA's umbrella. Please see the reports from Peace & Social Justice, Green Living, Interweave, and Hunger Task Force. FIA works to bring together some of the work of the committees, as for example in events co-sponsored by PSJ

and Green; to ensure that activities are reported on in the church newsletter, including photos; and to raise funds to support the work of the committees and allocate funds we raise and funds allocated to FIA in the church budget.

## PEACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

During the past 2015-16 church year, the Peace and Social Justice Committee (PSJ) continued activities in the areas of labor and economic issues; racism, police brutality, and mass incarceration; immigration and immigrant detention; and peace and alternatives to war, in some cases expanding its actions in response to local, national and international events. It also collaborated with the Green Committee on activities focusing on climate change.



### Labor and Economic Issues

PSJ continued to work with CLUE (Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice) on behalf of workers in the car wash and hotel industries in Santa Monica. PSJ is supporting workers at The Shore Hotel on Ocean Ave. who are accusing the owners of unfair labor practices.

PSJ co-sponsored a public forum with the ACLU SoCal Westside Chapter on “Homelessness on the Westside” in September.

FIA/PSJ have also joined with CLUE and other groups to support the “Raise the Wage” campaign, prevent wage theft, and guarantee paid sick days in Santa Monica. On April 26, the Santa Monica City Council unanimously approved the most progressive minimum wage package in the country. Phased increases to reach \$15 in 2020 for most businesses including paid sick days.

### Racism, Police Brutality and Mass Incarceration

Following the killing of three men in Venice: Brendon Glenn and Jason Davis by police, and Jascent-Jamal Lee Warren, by an armed employee of a Venice hotel, the PSJ group and members of First UU Church sponsored marches and rallies from August through November to protest racist police harassment and brutality, and in March a group of us including Rev. Rebecca submitted a petition to DA Lacey to prosecute Clifford Proctor, the LAPD officer who killed Brendon Glenn.

Beginning in July 2015, PSJ and other community groups as well as business representatives and LAPD officers participated in The Venice Partnership meetings designed to improve community-police relations and promote public safety in Venice. Sarah Robson and Peggy Rhoads attended several of these meetings and contributed a number of suggestions. As of August, UUSM is the host location for meetings of the Coalition for Police Reform in Santa Monica, which among other activities responds to incidents of racial profiling.

Several members of P&SJ participated in an anti-KKK rally in Anaheim Feb. 27. One was arrested, along with a member of

First UU church and a mutual friend. There was an outpouring of emotional and financial support for the three, from our congregants and First Church's, as well as from people around the country.

After several members attended GA in Portland, OR, where an Action of Immediate Witness supporting the Black Lives Matter movement was passed, P&SJ voted to have a Black Lives Matter/ Standing on the Side of Love banner, designed by Rhonda Peacock, which is placed in front of the church during Sunday services. At the May 22nd Annual Meeting, a congregational vote will take place to have the banner permanently displayed in front of the church.

In January, Diana Spears organized FIA/PSJ participation in the annual Santa Monica celebration of Martin Luther King Day with a UU information booth and the BLM/SSL banner.

FIA/PSJ also responded to the continuing need for textbooks for courses in California prisons, demonstrated by letters from student inmates who received textbooks in the past expressing their gratitude for the opportunities that the books and courses provide. The second campaign to raise funds for textbooks for incarcerated students during July-September brought in \$2,212 through generous donations by the congregation.



### Immigration and Immigrant Detention

Working with Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC) and Friends of Orange County Detainees, Peggy Rhoads, Cathie Gentile and other members of the UUSM congregation continue regular visits with immigrant detainees at the James Musick and Theo Lacey facilities in Orange County. In some cases, PSJ members have attended hearings for specific immigrants where an immigration judge determines whether the detainee can be released under bond, deported or granted asylum status and released to a sponsor.

On August 31 to September 2, several PSJ members attended a retreat organized by CIVIC that included visitation groups from all over the country to advocate an end to immigrant deportations and to discuss goals for the coming year, including expansion of visits to immigrant detainees, legal and political advocacy for immigrants, and publications of stories and poems by detainees.

In February, P&SJ set up a table to enable congregants to send Valentines with personal notes to immigrants in detention.

### Peace/Alternatives to War

We showed Faces of the Enemy (July 12), which portrays how people are dehumanized to justify war.

Members of PSJ as well as other members of the congregation attended a workshop during the UUA General Assembly in June presented by the UUs for Justice in the Middle East (UUJME) on the impact of Israel's occupation in Gaza and the West Bank. Beginning in October, Roberta Frye and Cathie Gentile facilitated a series

of workshops on the Seven Principles and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on a study guide by UUJME. They also submitted a Business Resolution by Petition to the 2016 GA entitled Divestment from Corporations Complicit in the Violation of Palestinian Rights.

In March, 25 FIA/P&SJ and members of the congregation participated in an interfaith march in solidarity with our Muslim Sisters and Brothers: "In the Path of the Prophet Abraham." Rev. Rebecca joined us at the Islamic Center of Southern California, where the march concluded with a program and food.

### Climate Justice

At UUSM, the annual Pipes lecture, organized by Diana Spears (October 10), focused on climate change and featured James Dusenberry, a facilitator of Al Gore's Climate Reality Project, as well as three other speakers. Approximately 85 people attended and contributed \$129 in donations. PSJ also collaborated with the Green Committee in presenting two films for Second Sunday Cinema. The film Bidder 70 (April 12) portrays the civil disobedience of environmental activist Tim de Christopher, who thwarted an auction of oil properties by attending the auction and outbidding all potential buyers, resulting in his arrest, trial and imprisonment. He helped create a grassroots movement opposing climate change, and is currently studying to become a UU Minister. The anti-fracking film, Groundswell Rising, shown on October 11, traces the success of grassroots movements promoting bans, moratoriums, and referenda on fracking.

The PSJ also showed a film based on Naomi Klein's book This Changes Everything in January as well as sponsoring 2nd Sunday Supper. Rick Rhoads and James Witker led a series of discussions on the book in February/March.

In April, P&SJ and the Green Living Committee showed a documentary on climate change: The Wisdom to Survive.

### Ongoing

Members of FIA/P&SJ are participating in jUJustice, formerly the Greater Los Angeles UU Justice Group, meetings every two months at Neighborhood Church. (Submitted by Nora Hamilton, Peggy Rhoads and Cathie Gentile)

## SECOND SUNDAY CINEMA

*James Witker*

Second Sunday Cinema has continued for the second consecutive year. Following Second Sunday Supper at approximately 7:30pm, this activity combines the fellowship of the monthly community meal with an informative and provocative film (usually a documentary) relevant to current events and UU values. After the screening we hold a moderated discussion about our reactions to the film and the issues it raises. Sunday nights are often the end of a long church day for some of us, and an event which typically goes later than 9-9:30pm is not ideal for everyone. Still, this time still seems to be better than most for our monthly community screenings.

Our events were somewhat fewer in the past year, in part because one of SSC's founders and organizers, Brig Johnson, moved back to Florida in the Fall of 2015. But we look forward to continuing the program and hopefully screening a film on every second Sunday when there isn't a Sunday Spotlight. Most of the films we have shown thus far have been relevant to issues taken up by the Green Living and Peace & Social Justice Committees, but other groups (such as Interweave) should have the chance to participate in selecting titles as well. We are especially excited now that the new projection system is mounted and connected, providing much improved video and audio quality. The ability to



hold high-quality film screenings is an asset to the congregation and also a good way to attract visitors from the wider community.

Goals for the upcoming year: Hopefully we can plan the films further in advance, publicize them more widely, and involve more members and friends of the congregation. There is usually a licensing cost that we have to pay distributors to do a public screening, and we collect donations in order to help cover these costs. Increased attendance in the future will hopefully enable us to completely cover the cost of licensing fees.

Following is a list of Second Sunday Cinema screenings from the past year:

June 14 "A Killer Bargain"

July 12 "Faces of the Enemy"

October 11 "Groundswell Rising: Protecting our Children's Air & Water"

January 10 "This Changes Everything"

Earth Sunday, April 24 "The Wisdom to Survive"

April was the first time we screened a film in the sanctuary with the new projector ready in its new mount and the video and audio quality proved to be superb, a major upgrade from the equipment we have used in the past. The turnout was especially good, approximately 45 people including outside visitors and members of Citizens' Climate Lobby who had been invited by me, James.

## GREEN LIVING/GREEN SANCTUARY COMMITTEE

*Alison Kendall*

The Green Living Committee is part of Faith in Action and meeting monthly on the first Sunday of the month at 12:30 pm in SE Cottage. We have an active core of about ten to twenty members, with a large email list and partnerships with many others for programs. We recently hosted our Second Sunday Supper attended by about 80 members, with a theme of Healthy Food/Healthy Planet on April 10. The meal featured "beyond organic LA produce" from our partnership with Community Services United, a South LA organization working on environmental justice, healthy food access and community empowerment. We've provided green building and grant writing assistance to CSU and April's generous congregation donations will go toward their Veggie Bus seed library and classroom project at their new Vermont and Gage headquarters.

We are working with Reverend Rebecca on the April 24 Earth Day Service, where we will have a range of information on ways we can personally, as a church, and politically work to implement the recent Paris COP15 Agreement to reduce global warming and protect our environment. We've hosted at least four sustainability and social action themed films with Peace and Social Justice including April 24's "Wisdom to Survive". These activities are in conjunction with our Green Sanctuary Application, recently approved by the Board and requiring a wide range of programming around environmental and social justice issues.

Closer to home, we completed and dedicated the Garden of Eternity project in December, featuring native and California friendly plants, water efficient landscaping, and a patio composed of bricks which can be engraved with loved one's names. This project involved numerous meetings to refine the design, a successful Spirit Level Grant and matching donation from Ray Goodman. The response to the garden and the engraved brick memorials has exceeded expectations, and it has become a beloved feature of our campus.

For next year, in addition to completing our Green Sanctuary application, we hope to develop a funding proposal for installing photovoltaic panels on Forbes Hall to offset our electrical energy use. Preliminary feasibility studies show this is highly feasible, but will require member donations of about \$30,000, ideally by those able to benefit from federal and state tax benefits. Like the Memorial Garden, this is a project which expresses our core values and is financially sound with a relatively short payback period (under 10 years). Our primary need is partnership with members with financial expertise and resources who can help evaluate the finance options.



## MEMBERSHIP

*Jackie Schwab*

Lots of changes and advances have been happening this year in the Membership Committee. For starters, much of the past year was under the leadership of Olga Felton, who has helped enormously to streamline the monthly meetings and gather our thoughts into concrete ideas for furthering the current goals of membership. April marked the end of Olga serving as Membership Chair — thank you so much for your service! The Membership Committee is currently searching for a new Chair.

During this past year, we were able to organize what we hope will be the first of a twice annual New Member Recognition on Sunday, April 10th, 2016. New members were officially recognized during the service, and biographies were printed in the Order of Service so we may all get to know our new people better and welcome them into the congregation. Photos were taken by Charles Haskell and we are currently in the process of updating our New Members board in Forbes Hall.

Newcomer Orientation, part of our current unofficial "path to membership" has changed significantly within the past year in an attempt to improve upon an already great program. The location has been changed from the ever-busy Sanctuary Alcove to the more personal space of Rev. Rebecca's office. Due to attendance fluctuation, ranging from zero to close to 20, elaborate snacks have been pared down to pre-packaged healthy foods and water. This is still an on-going process but all involved feel confident in the changes. More effort has also gone into reaching out to visitors the week before the meeting, via phone and/or email, encouraging them to come and learn more about our community (thank you Rick Teplitz for your work in this regard!). The Office Assistant is conducting outreach to invite visitors to Newcomer Orientation, coordinate Newcomer Orientation, and track visitor attendance for further development along the path to membership.

Barbara Gibbs has been great in organizing the staffing of the Welcome Table that we have in the courtyard after services during coffee hour. This helps provide a physical place for visitors to stop by, and a friendly volunteer to answer any questions they may

have. We also encourage any UUSM members to stop by when they see a visitor and introduce themselves!

Overall, thank you to everyone who has helped in Membership aspects this last year, including, (but not limited to): Abby Arnold, Rev. Rebecca Benefiel Bijur, Joe Engleman, Melinda Ewen, Olga Felton, Barbara Gibbs, Charles Haskell, Kris Langabeer, Catherine



Farmer Loya, Rhonda Peacock, Beth Rendeiro, Carol Ring, Jackie Schwab, Rick Teplitz, Linda Van Ligten & Patricia Wright.

We look forward to an even more productive year coming up! As we continue learning and developing ideas about what Membership means and how to increase the UUSM membership, we hope you will be encouraged to take an active role, help out, or just make sure you say “hi!” to a new person every Sunday! As we develop UUSM into a more friendly and welcoming environment I am confident we will succeed in increasing our numbers!

## CAREGIVERS’ SUPPORT GROUP

*Joyce Holmen and Helen Brown*

When this group began meeting 16 years ago, “family caregiver” was not a term that was commonly understood and those who had such responsibilities bore them in isolation. By now many books, news stories, documentaries, websites, and organizations are available to offer you insight or assistance. But there’s nothing like the relief of having an encouraging support group to help you navigate the troubled waters of providing care for a chronically ill family member or friend. So in the Caregivers’ Support Group we listen a lot and share strategies for coping with a host of medical, social, personal, legal, and practical details necessary for keeping a loved one safe and as healthy and happy as possible over the long haul. Members have developed expertise in taking care of loved ones with various situations including Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, diabetes, cancer, depression, heart problems at home, in assisted living, in rehab or a nursing home, and in hospice care. Our minister also visits this small group occasionally with her kind and wise presence.

When you devote yourself to offering comfort and explanations, as well as patient advocacy, using special equipment, visits to ER, learning about new diagnoses, complex medication management, meeting dietary restrictions or insurance restrictions all while adjusting to changes in family dynamics and/or finances it can be alternately depressing, rewarding, frustrating, and overwhelming. Successes can seem brief. Are you handling 24/7 care for a spouse or parent, part-time care, monitoring things long-distance, packing and moving, or stepping forward in a crisis? Whew! A group of people in the church community

with experiences similar to yours might help you deal with such problems and with maintaining your own life and health. We invite you to meetings (on the third Tuesday morning of each month) and to talk with us whether or not you can attend.

## FUUSION

*Karen Hsu Patterson*

fUUsion is a social group for young adults, with a target demographic between 18-35 years of age. We strive to be a welcoming way to introduce new young adults and potential new members to UUSM, and to create an atmosphere for young adults to build and nurture friendship, spiritual growth, and community. We communicate via an email listserv of approximately 140 members, as well as via a public Facebook page with over 150 “likes” and supporters. We also have a Meetup page, aimed at reaching out to young adults who may not yet be familiar with Unitarian Unitarianism or with UUSM.

Despite the great number of people subscribed to the email listserv and supporting the public Facebook page, fUUsion active membership more accurately consists of roughly 12-18 people.

fUUsion aims to host and sponsor social events, spiritual events, and service projects. While most events are aimed at young adults at UUSM, several have been open to the wider UUSM community as well.

Social activities include group lunches after Sunday services, movie nights, and potlucks. fUUsion members continue to support and serve UUSM through committee work and are a vibrant part of the UUSM community. In addition, fUUsion is active in the Pacific Southwest District (PSWD). fUUsion members attended and helped to staff the annual PSWD Young Adult weekend at Camp de Benneville Pines (September 2015).

Recent challenges facing fUUsion are related to the fact that core members of the group are “aging out” or circling out of its stated target demographic. As group members become older, it becomes more difficult to attract younger members who may or may not feel comfortable with a widening age difference. Another challenge in the past year has been in planning scheduled events. Much of the event planning has fallen primarily to the group coordinator, which means that when life demands attention in other ways, events are simply not planned if no other group members take up this task.

Moving forward, we are experimenting with recurring monthly meetings, and we are seeking added input and suggestions from young adults to better define the group’s purpose and goals.

We hope that fUUsion continues to be a vital community for growing and nurturing connection and friendship among the UU young adult community, and beyond.

## COFFEE COMMITTEE

*Nancy Howell*

The coffee committee volunteers have continued to enjoy serving coffee, tea and cookies to the congregation after each church service. We also provide coffee service for special events. We are proud to continue being aware of our environment. We serve coffee and tea in ceramic cups. Coffee grounds are put into the compost barrel. We serve sugar from a container rather than individually wrapped packages. We serve only fair traded coffee. We use cloth tablecloths rather than paper. Our napkins are made of recycled paper.

As coordinator, I would like express my appreciation for a great

group of dedicated people on this committee. They are as follows: Robert and Phyllis Kory, Sheila Bjornlie, Leah Moore, Kit Shaw, Alicia Van Ooyen, Jennifer Westbay, Linda van Ligten, Pam Teplitz, Peggy Rhoads, Resa Foreman, Sylvia Young, Sheila Cummins, Jila Tayefehnowrooz, Jonathan Bijur, Linda Marten, Deirdre Dietel, Eileen McCormack, and Rebecca Crawford.

Our committee appreciates the numerous people who have donated cookies this past year, particularly those who have purchased Girl Scout cookies and have donated them to us.

Our goal for the next year is to remain flexible and continue the great coffee service.

We would invite anyone interested to join our volunteer group. It is an enjoyable way to meet and greet the people in our church.



## ART WALL

*Beverly Alison*

Another exciting, international experience for the art wall committee. We have presented art pieces from Zimbabwe rural artists, from Mother Russia as well as a group of Ethiopian artists. Our graduate of the Teheran Art Institute, Jasmani Norad, offered us the mystery of geometric figures and patterns in her creations and Michael Giliberti returned with New York chic selections. All of the artists were so well received by our congregation — they all want to return with new and thought provoking work. The seduction to come: Glass and neon work in July, nano art in September and a vibrant show from a very talented Latino creator. We look forward to exploring and sharing the challenging and enriching world of the art wall with you next year. And a very special thanks to Nancy Thompson and Jackie Schwab for all their wisdom and help in making the art wall unique. (Beverly Alison, Carol Ring, Bob Deitz)

## KNITTERS & FRIENDS

Knitters and Friends continue to enjoy fellowship between services. We had our annual Holiday Bazaar in December where we raised money for the congregation. Very active with our Prayer Shawl Ministry, providing items for Rebecca to take on pastoral visits.

## QUILTERS

*Joyce Holmen*

In 2012 Emmy Cresciman gathered a few stitchers with the idea of making quilts out of neckties; it sounded fun and it was. We asked the congregation to bring in ties that weren't needed at home anymore, and you donated small and large bags of them, several hundred in all. We are grateful for these bright colors, dull colors, silks and cottons, interesting and plain textures, stripes, dots, and so many other beauties! We sorted, washed, pooled supplies, and got started using this exciting palette, learning how to work some of the fabrics into 14-inch crazy-quilt squares, embellished with embroidery. Careful but not speedy, it took us many months to accumulate a dozen of these. And changed our mind about making a quilt; instead, we fashioned the jewel-toned squares into grand pillows sold at the Knitters and Friends sales in the next couple of years. Meanwhile, ideas flew about making quilts together and separately. Meeting on Saturdays in Forbes Hall, we shared techniques and stories with each other, bringing lots of show-and-tell. And three years we have had the pleasure of creating a totally unique quilt to welcome a baby into the family of a church staff member. A few times we took a field trip together to a quilt show for inspiration. Our busy lives have put the group on hold for a few months, but hands are still eager to play with fabric, and minds keep playing with designs and colors. Could we interest you in a sewing project, something that exercises both creativity and generosity? If so, please talk to Emmy Cresciman, Barbara Kernochan, Sheila Cummins, Katie Malich, or me, and we'll get our needles threaded in colors that make you happy.

## BOOKSTORE

In October 2015, Nancy Babbitt, our long time Bookstore manager, decided to retire and asked for another member of our community to take over the Bookstore. In November 2015, Mark Warkentin volunteered to take on managing our UU Bookstore.

Due to many generous donations of books, the shelves filled to overflowing. A table was set up on several Sundays to encourage members to take books home to relieve the overcrowding.

In the coming months, the shelves will be re-organized with 7 sections devoted to each of our 7 Principles. Books that specifically address each Principle will be on a shelf focused on that Principle.

Due to your generous donations, the Bookstore has \$475.36 in its fund. This will be donated to social action groups and our RE program this month.

## MEN'S GROUP

Our work in 2015-2016 was to meet regularly, share what has happened in our lives since last meeting, and then have stimulating, illuminating, and challenging discussions about a wide range of subjects. We also offer recognition for each other successes and support each other when difficulties occur.

Our greatest accomplishment was to share our lives, have meaningful discussions and to increase the numbers of the group.

Our group does not normally face serious challenges with the exception perhaps of sympathizing with one another's suffering, loss, health issues, and work, or lack of it.

Our biggest goal other than continuing our discussions will be hosting the DFD Pancake Breakfast this summer.

We can always have more men join the group. Our group will provide the funds to put the breakfast on and a few of us are going to work, but we will need several more volunteers - hopefully some

who have worked on the breakfast before (I have a few names from last year). If you can help, please contact Richard Mathias at 310-645-1070.

## NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

*Jacki Weber*

Your newsletter committee published monthly print newsletters distributed to members and friends along with creating online versions of the newsletter throughout the year. In February 2016, editor-in-chief Charles Haskell resigned. Jacki Weber stepped into the role on an interim basis in March.

The newsletter team has been amazingly dedicated, some working for decades to support publication. The team looks forward to expanding our circle of writers, editors, designers, and photographers. We also hope to broaden our focus, looking at how we can better support overall church communication (whether through social media; email communication; our website, which features both public and members-only content; or other means).

We are excited to bring you into the conversation. Email [newsletter@uusm.org](mailto:newsletter@uusm.org) if you are interested in learning more or contributing.

The fine print: The primary function of the newsletter is to inform the congregation and visitors of church matters, programs, and activities. The Newsletter Team is responsible for production of the newsletter, including making reasonable discretionary decisions relating to content and design. The team chooses its own editor-in-chief to serve for each church year (July to June), subject to approval for a two-year term by the board of directors. Space and emphasis in the newsletter is allocated according to priorities that are available on request. All newsletter items should be emailed to [newsletter@uusm.org](mailto:newsletter@uusm.org) by noon on the 15th of the month. Articles received by this deadline are published, provided they are considered appropriate material for the newsletter. Articles received after the deadline may or may not be published, depending on available space and whether the material can be added to the issue without disrupting our publication schedule. The editor-in-chief may edit material for length, style, grammar, etc., and refuse material that is not appropriate. Any questions or problems concerning the newsletter should be addressed to the editor-in-chief. All material published is copyrighted and is the property of the church.

Your newsletter committee:

Editor-in-Chief: Charles Haskell, July 2011 to February 2016; Jacki Weber, March 2016 to present

Editors: Laura Eklund, Elizabeth Fuller, Joyce Holmen, Rima Snyder, Jennifer Westbay, and Rick Rhoads

Calendar: Laura Eklund

Art Directors: Carol Ring, Pam Teplitz

Photographers: Charles Haskell, Carol Ring

Distribution: Elizabeth Fuller (electronic edition) and Peggy Kharraz (paper edition)

Staff changes in 2015-2016: Charles Haskell resigned as editor-in-chief in March 2016. Wendell Pascual resigned as a graphic designer. Jacki Weber joined the newsletter team to help expand congregational communication options and now serves as committee chair and editor-in-chief.

## CAMP DE BENNEVILLE

*Jacki Weber, Program Dean for UUSM Weekend*

Save the date now for our all-ages congregation-wide weekend at Camp de Benneville Pines September 16-18, 2016! We are fortunate to have such a wonderful retreat just 100 miles east of Santa Monica. We program the weekend to be family friendly as well as singles and empty-nester-welcome with arts and crafts, nourishment for the head and the heart, lots of music, and unstructured time. The Camp staff cook all of our meals and care for the 4-bunk and 6-bunk cabin rooms as well as the gorgeous campus that offers hiking, swimming, archery, and lazing by the stream.

Last year's camp had a few spaces left so this year we are working judiciously to fill it up before summer break. Bunks start at \$75 for wee ones and \$145 for adults. A few double-bed rooms are also available. We offer "camperships" for those who are financially challenged.

Outside of our congregation's weekend, we have access to the camp year-round. Find out more about all the different offerings at [uucamp.org](http://uucamp.org).

Find out more about our camp at [uusm.org](http://uusm.org) (search on keyword camp). Contact Jacki Weber at [jacki.weber@gmail.com](mailto:jacki.weber@gmail.com) with questions or to get involved.



## SECOND SUNDAY SUPPER

*Melinda Ewen, Barbara Gibbs, Rhonda Peacock*

The Second Sunday Supper (SSS) Committee solicited host groups from our congregation to plan and serve a pot luck type meal once per month for fellowship among our members, and friends. SSS is an important opportunity for us to get to know one another in a relaxed and welcoming environment while we enjoy a meal together. It was often followed by a talent show or movie sponsored by other church groups, and sometimes proceeded by a vespers service in the sanctuary. SSS deeply supports the membership of our congregation by giving opportunities for old-timers and newcomers to get to know one another and form community while enjoying a fine meal. It was created in 2007 by John Fels and Ron Crane, and has been continuous since that time.

We are deeply grateful to our hosts who planned and executed the events. Our hosts were: The Heart to Heart groups, The Board of Directors, The Finance Committee, The Green Committee (twice!!), Faith in Action, The Choir, Religious Exploration, Atheists, Agnostics, and Humanists (AAHS), Interweave.

## DISCUSSION & SUPPORT GROUP FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mark Christiansen, MS, MFT

The Discussion and Support Group for Persons with Disabilities (DSGPD) had a year that was filled with growth and discovery. DSGPD developed a core group of members who formed a dependable clutch of people who introduced several themes that veined our twice-a-month discussions. Chief among these topics were 1- How to increase the membership of our group and 2- How to help make UUSM more “Disabled Friendly.” Also brought up for discussion were the rather broad topics of how to improve the quality of one’s life overall and how to use structure, aides and devices in one’s life that aid one in functioning more successfully/productively/efficiently in one’s life.

They were very pithy topics.

Due to the DSGPD group members often maintaining plural memberships in groups at UUSM and other reasons, the attendance to the DSGPD ranged from 0 to 7. The average was around 4. The group attendees, at any one point in time, have represented a wide range of physically-limiting or psychologically/emotionally-limiting conditions. These included Acquired Traumatic Brain Injury, Stroke, Cerebral Palsy, Depression and group members who are able-bodied, among other conditions.

Undoubtedly, a high-point of the DSGPD was the degree and amount of support and personal sharing that characterized the meetings. There has been both some fine and helpful problem-solving that has gone on in the group towards helping with some personal problems that have been aired and a lot of basic heart-felt support that is generously offered in the group. The DSGPD had offered the forum within which its members have felt the benefit of its mutual support, but also, when appropriate, the gift of frank and honest feedback between its members.

One of the neat features about the DSGPD is the fact that, along with its members representing a wide range of personally limiting conditions, there can be able-bodied people in group. This represents the more wide-ranging, all-inclusive nature of the DSGPD.

A challenge for the DSGPD is how to increase the number of people who attend the groups regularly. Finding a way to let more people know of the group’s existence seems to be an important concern. The DSGPD has presented itself to UUSM twice during the chalice lighting with a goal of recruiting more members. While there have been no new members resulting directly from that, the DSGPD has had more people come to it from the outside of UUSM. This was the result of word-of-mouth communication.

## AAHS

Mark Warkentin

AAHS (Agnostics, Atheists, Humanists, Secularists and recently included Skeptics) was founded in the fall of 2011 by Len Harris and Ian Dodd to provide a specifically “theism-free” organization within our congregational family. More than 50% of our congregation have identified as Humanists or other non-theists. All are welcome at our meetings, regardless of theological beliefs or unbeliefs.

Current co-leaders are Mark Warkentin, James Witker and Steve White.

Mark sits at the AAHS table between and after our services most Sundays. He explains the purpose of our group to new attendees, invites them to meetings, to sign up for the email list and chats

with any church members that pass by.

James acts as a resource for written works on Humanism, current Humanist issues and how freethought ideas connect with and enhance our UU values.

Steve moderates our meetings when he is available and ensures all attendees have a chance to contribute to our monthly discussions.

AAHS provides a forum for discussion of important issues of our times (see list below) and has hosted several church events. We provide a welcoming and supportive group for visitors, newcomers and those outside our congregation who have come out as “god-free” and are seeking a welcoming community of like-minded individuals. We welcome those who may have been ostracized from their families and communities after they took a stand on their rejection of belief in gods.



AAHS outreach using social media has grown over the last three years.

- The AAHS mailing list has steadily grown from 147 as of April 2015, to 167 as of May 2016.
- Our Meetup email list (which reaches out to the community beyond our congregation) has grown from 276 members in 2015 to 432 members as of May 2016. This outreach has resulted in several new attendees from our Santa Monica community participating that are not part of our congregation.
- Our Facebook AAHS group had 47 members last year, growing to 59 members by May 2016. This is a “closed group”— new members can be added by any current member. Any member may post to this group, sharing a wide variety of subjects and ideas relevant to freethought and how we are connected to Unitarian Universalist principles. Membership is focused on UU members that have active Facebook accounts.

Monthly meetings attract 15-30 attendees. Our meetings begin with a presentation or video, followed by a discussion of the subject. Over the past year, topics of discussion have included:

The Freethinker Friendly program that was presented at the General Assembly 2015.

A Video of a Sam Harris interview on “Waking Up: Spirituality without Religion”.

Len Harris presented his “Essentials for a Healthier Future” paper.

How proactive are you in your disbelief? Do you keep silent about your freethought beliefs so you don’t “rock the boat”?

Humanism, Religion & Climate Change: What’s the Connection? Presented by James Witker.

A Secular Xmas — how did you celebrate this year? Do you feel forced into religious celebrations with your family and friends?

Bettye Barclay sent out a questionnaire to UU members about transcendental experiences last years. That survey was provided and we discussed our views on (and some shared experiences of)

transcendence.

Has New Atheism run its course? Is it time for moderation in our language and message?

We began a series of presentations and discussions of each of the subjects that compose our name: Atheism, Agnosticism, Humanism, Secularism and Skepticism. These were taken in the order of available speakers/presenters. One example of the differences between these is a quote from Jerry DeWitt, author of “Hope after Faith: An Ex-Pastor’s Journey from Belief to Atheism” and a prominent member of the American atheism movement.

*Skepticism is my attitude;  
Freethought is my right;  
Agnosticism is my humility;  
Atheism is my conclusion;  
Humanism is my worldview.*

**Our Series has covered:**

Atheism: what is it and why are there Atheists attending this church?

Skepticism: Ubi dubium, ibi libertas (Where there is doubt, There is freedom)

This summer we will conclude this series by covering Humanism, Secularism, and Agnosticism, devoting a full meeting to each subject.

AAHS has supported the church community in the following ways this past year:

Promoted the 24th Annual Ernest D. Pipes Distinguished Lecture Series on Climate Reality given by James Dusenberry — who is an environmental activist, political & community organizer, and a certified Climate Reality Leader of The Climate Reality Project.

Ian Dodd spoke at the Studio City UU church on “Building Community from the Ground Up” — sharing the story of Sunday Assembly Los Angeles and the lessons he has learned from leading our AAHS group and since helping co-found SALA.

AAHS Hosted the Second Sunday Supper in March.

For the third year in a row, AAHS contributed to the Dining 4 Dollars silent auction with 15 people signed up for the Pastafarian Pirate Feast that will be given June 18.

Promoted the Humanist Celebrant training given by John Figdor, the Humanist chaplain at Stanford University. Humanist Celebrants conduct humanist, secular, nonreligious, non-theistic, and inter-religious weddings, memorials, baby naming, and other life-cycle ceremonies.

David Olson has taken responsibility for overseeing the production of the Humanist banner that was approved by the Board last year. Progress is being made on ensuring the banner is in keeping with the appearance and format of those already hanging in the sanctuary.

The AAHS fund stands at \$197.00. These funds will be used for printing brochures, supporting upcoming speaker events and other special events.

AAHS welcomes all who want to connect with like-minded people and who share our interests and our curiosity about the diverse world of freethought ideas and issues.

## FICTION READING GROUP

*Melinda Ewen and Lucy Hahn*

The Fiction Reading group met monthly to discuss selected novels. One recurring question we address is: “Why do we read fiction?” One answer was to study the lives of literary characters to emulate the actions of their lives that made life meaningful and to avoid those that caused pain. Our group is open to all UUCSM members and friends.

This year we read:

*The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai  
*The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst  
*Disgrace* by J. M. Coetzee  
*The Awakening* by Kate Chopin  
*Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen  
*What is the What* by David Eggers  
*The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri  
*White Teeth* by Zadie Smith  
*Island of a Thousand Mirrors* by Nayomi Munaweera  
*Death with Interruptions* by Jose Saramago  
*Animal Dreams* by Barbara Kingsolver  
*Plainsong* by Kent Haruf



## LAST CONVERSATIONS

*Cassandra Christensen*

**Our Name:** While this group started as Last Conversations, evolved to End of Life Discussions, it is also known as the Conversations about Death group.

**Beginning:** This program arose from the outreach I did during the AIDS crisis in the 1990s, when as a Registered Nurse I developed Project Nightlight, a nonprofit with Michael Eselun on the board, to guide and support partners and families, caregivers and volunteers to be at the bedside to care.

Later, on becoming a member here, I talked with our minister, Rev. Rebecca Bijur, about my doing a workshop on this time of life. She felt the idea of support and education about this often taboo topic was important for our congregation and encouraged me in this — addressing concerns surrounding the end of life in a group where people could talk and listen to one another about this important concern.

Emmie Cresciman, former Lifespan RE Committee member, and Karen Hsu Patterson, Adult Religious Education, and DRE Catherine Farmer Loya further encouraged me. Melinda Ewen did not lose the vision I shared with her and coached me forward. In the last months of preparation, Beth Rendeiro helped me through the process of making this project a reality, and we offered together our first evening in May 2015. Eighteen people came to begin our program, a series of two sessions a month, with occasional workshops.

**For the year:** Attendance on Monday evenings varies between six and two dozen, with a core of regulars coming to our get-togethers twice a month, one evening for discussion, and the other with a

presenter addressing an end of life concern. Beth Rendeiro, Joyce Holmen, Karl Lisovsky, Richard Mathias, and I have facilitated meetings of our group.

**Our presenters:** Church members Cynthia Cottam, MD, providing encouragement and ideas for family and friend discussion; Joyce Holmen, suggesting helpful resources and places to turn to; Linda Van Ligten, RN, giving clarity on hospice vs. palliative care; Leon Henderson-MacLennan, MD, sharing a doctor's perspective on dying; Karen Hsu-Patterson, RN, NP, advising us on the role of emergency responders and ICU when death is immediate; Richard Mathias, creating an evening with the philosophy of Death Café; and my friend Debbie Rothschild, Social Worker from St. John's Hospital, guiding us on how to comfort and care when hope is gone.

**Additional discussions, workshops and events:**

- October – We had a special class in the sanctuary on how to come to the bedside in the last hours of life, to comfort, deeply respecting life, and what can be said and done to create a warm, supportive environment, and gentle the other through the letting go.

- November — We had a Saturday workshop to begin our paperwork to insure our wants for this end time were clear. Five of us, including a member who several months later died, worked together on a Saturday afternoon.

- March — The ministry theme was Mortality with Conversations about Death an integral part of the month. We offered four special evenings with guest speakers and co-created a Sunday service with Rev. Bijur. She and I shared our experiences with death in an informational conversation, Music Director DeReau Farrar brought us special music, including Daniel Gledhill playing Chopin's Piano Sonata No.2 in B flat minor, Opus 35, and the congregation acknowledged their experiences by standing in response to questions and had opportunity to write down their own concerns. And we sang, "Comfort Me," saying so much about this time of letting go.

**Future plans:** The program is now under the guidance of Joyce Holmen.

She is looking forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas about the future of Last Conversations. She has planned a workshop on Monday, Memorial Day, to help individuals prepare critical paperwork that will guide their families and physicians with personal instructions about end-of-life care: a Durable Power for Healthcare and a POLST for each of us.

We are grateful for her wonderful ideas to further prepare us for this time of life, and for her wisdom, her ample experience, and extensive resources.

**Those helped by this series:** This program enabled me to work with the member who died recently. On his request we worked together, one on one, as I guided him through his Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care and accompanied him in his submitting it to his hospital of choice.

Another member whose parent died said the evenings enabled her to overcome her fear, to comfort and care through those last days. She was profoundly moved she could do that for her, saying "I hope others can join in this group, as I found it a priceless tool."

Through this program our UU church is able to serve those who come to sanctuary, heal, and be inspired, so that no one is left alone at this most profoundly mysterious time of life.



*Love generously  
Seek truth  
Serve the world*



**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
COMMUNITY CHURCH**

**OF SANTA MONICA**

1260 Eighteenth Street  
Santa Monica, CA 90404



Phone: 310/829-5436

Fax: 310/998-9181

E-mail: [office@uusm.org](mailto:office@uusm.org)

Web: [www.uusm.org](http://www.uusm.org)

# REPORT ON PROGRAMS

# 2015-16

