



**The Unitarian Universalist
Community Church of Santa Monica**

September 22, 2011

Dear 6th-7th grade Parents/Guardians:

We have just launched our new program year, and this year our congregation's Religious Exploration program is once again offering the Neighboring Faiths program for our 6th-7th graders. There are some new developments this year, though – we are delighted to be able to offer this class at both our 9:00 and 11:00 services. And the curriculum itself has been extensively rewritten during the summer to make it much more tactile and engaging for our youth. We have fantastic teaching teams in place, and I know your youth will enjoy their time with them.

Included in this packet is an interview form that was sent home with youth from the first class last Sunday, which we hope that you will respond to as a family and bring back to class this week. As part of our entry into our explorations this year, we're hoping to engage the youth in taking a look at what their family's heritage looks like, culturally, ethnically and spiritually.

Neighboring Faiths takes the next step from our elementary RE program, and lays a foundation for our 8th Grade Coming of Age program, taking participants outside of our own walls to experience the wide variety of religious practice in our larger community. The program introduces participants to the faith traditions and practices of other religious groups, engaging participants in a religious journey that builds community among the youth, connects them with our congregation and larger community, and strengthens their Unitarian Universalist identity. They will participate personally in the faith traditions of others, visiting not as observers, but as "people being religious together" – to experience being silent for an hour in a room full of people, or to listen to the stories and metaphors of a Zen Buddhist teacher and meditate, or talk openly with youth from a Muslim community about what is most important in our respective faiths. On weeks when the class is on site at UCCSM, participants will use their experiences from their visits to reflect on the unique and universal of religious experience, to explore their own values as they relate to many other faith traditions, to become more aware of the many connections between Unitarian Universalism and other faith traditions, to increase their appreciation of religious diversity, and to build relationships with peers, adult leaders, and our congregation and community. This year we will explore Eastern and earth-based religions. In 2012-13 we will focus on Western traditions.

The following are a few important administrative items about the structure of our year.

- **The UCCSM RE Updates email is sent weekly** to provide updates about what will happen in class this week, a calendar and announcements for upcoming events, at-home suggestions for engaging with the themes we're exploring this year, and more. This is a primary means of communication with all of our RE families - if you are not receiving this email, contact me right away so we can get you on the list.
- **All families participating in RE must complete a registration form for each of their children.** These forms are crucial because they include emergency contact information, space to share any special needs or allergies child may have and other important information to help us get to know your child. If you have not already turned in a registration form, one is included in this mailing. Please complete it and bring it on Sunday.

- **Parent participation required:** Your help is vital to the success of our RE program. All parents are asked to contribute some of their time to our RE program this year. There are many different ways to be involved, which require varying levels of commitment. **Please fill out the volunteer commitment form which is attached to your child's registration form.**
- **Snack Signup request coming soon:** We would like to ask parents to sign up to bring a modest snack for their child's class this year, taking the burden off of the shoulders of the volunteer teachers who already do so very much for our program. You will be contacted soon with a request to sign up for a few Sundays during the year. Information about any food allergies as well as suggested snack items will be provided. Sharing food together is part of what binds us together as a caring community of faith, and our kids take snack time VERY seriously! Please help us keep our tradition of providing in-class snacks going.
- **Children/Youth Choir:** Does your child like to sing? Seth Houston, our new music director, is starting an occasional children's/youth choir that will perform a few times a year during Intergenerational Services. Rehearsals will be from 9-9:15 on Sundays (meet in the cottage rather than going to the sanctuary for the first part of the service) for a few weeks leading up to the performances. Contact Catherine@uusm.org if your child or youth is interested in participating. **The first rehearsal is THIS WEEK - Sunday, September 25th!** The choir will also rehearse on 10/16 and 10/23 for performance in service on 10/30, as well as 11/13 for performance in service on 11/20. It is an incredible opportunity for young people in our church to participate in the music program, with guidance from our Music Director. Please arrive by 8:50 so the group can be ready to start at 9:00 sharp – fifteen minutes isn't very long to rehearse! ***I know this plan is not ideal for 11:00 families, but Seth is in the service with the adult choir during the second service and so cannot work with the children at that time. If your child would like to participate, consider coming at 9:00 for the four rehearsal Sundays only. We hope to have children's music opportunities at additional times later in the year as well.***
- **Children's Chapel on 1st Sundays beginning in November.** On the first Sunday of each month, starting in November, we're trying something new: rather than attending the first part of the service in the sanctuary, all children will gather promptly at 9:00 under the shade structure behind the cottage for a 15-minute children's chapel service. Children will then go to their classes as usual. We'll post a reminder in front of the church on those Sundays.
- **Intergenerational services:** Throughout the year, we will have occasional Intergenerational services in which the children and youth are in the sanctuary for the entire service. These services help us celebrate being together as one UCCSM community of all ages, and also provide an important opportunity for young people to experience first-hand the way their parents worship in the sanctuary when they would usually be in their classrooms.

Please return the registration form as quickly as possible. It can be turned in to my box in the main office, or at the Lifespan RE table in Forbes Hall during coffee hour on Sundays. As always, please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Thank you for your involvement; thank you for recognizing the need for religious education in your children and youth's lives...thank you for adding your presence to this community. We are thrilled to have your family among us and look forward to an exciting year together!

See you in church,

Catherine Farmer Loya,
 Director of Religious Education
 310-829-5436 x105
 Catherine@uusm.org