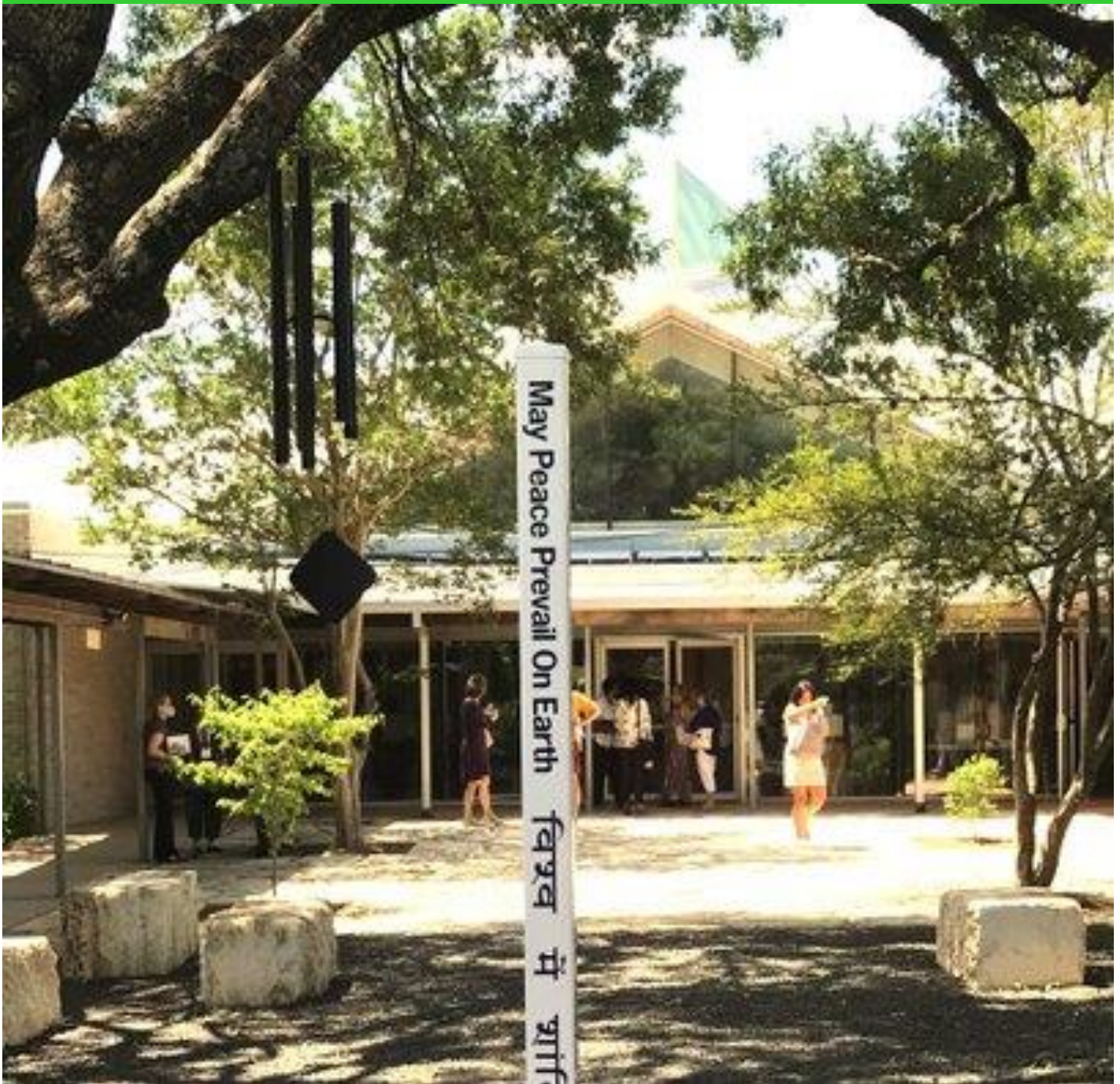


Inspire



FIRST UU
SAN ANTONIO

**The quarterly newsletter of
First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio
Summer 2022**



Inspire

newsletter@uusat.org

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Inspire is a publication of First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio. We welcome submissions of original articles, short stories, or poetry that encompass a UU theme. All submissions become the property of First UU. Publication of submissions is not guaranteed and is at the discretion of the editor. Send submissions to newsletter@uusat.org.

Cover photo: First UU courtyard on a beautiful May morning.

Contents

On Wholeness – page 2

Our New Assistant Minister – page 3

Farewell Beloved Community – page 4

Our New DLRE – page 5

Board of Trustees: 2021/2022 Annual Report – page 6

Capital Campaign Off to Good Start – page 7

A Visit to SAAACAM – page 8

CREF Nominations Needed – page 9

Asylum Seekers in San Antonio – page 10

General Assembly 2022 – page 12

UU the Vote SA – page 13

YRE Sunday – page 14

Youth Awards 2022 – page 15

Trust Fund for Endowments – page 16

Meet Our ASL Interpreter – page 16

Share the Plate Results for 2022-23 – page 17

Celestial Celebrations Circle Spring Happenings – page 18

Blessing of the Animals – page 19

Honoring Those Lost to Police Violence – page 20

Easter Egg Hunt Returns to First UU – page 20

Farewell Sheri and Roy – page 21

Star Dust – page 21

Condolences – page 22

On Wholeness

By Rev. Mark Skrabacz

Some of you may feel uncomfortable when I use the word God, and some of you tell me of your discomfort when I don't use the word God. We have a wide range of views in our congregation about the place and meaning of religious words. That's in part because our theologies can be so unique to each of us. And also, because for some, we are working on what these mean to us.

Let me give you my thoughts on how to approach the word and concept of God. For me, God is a word for the Mystery in which we exist. It is a word for the sacredness that I especially sense in our human experience, within Nature, the earth, the universe. It is also called "the ground of being," as theologian Paul Tillich said. Let's put it this way—as a human being, I'm accountable to something larger than myself. And I might choose to call that to which I am accountable God. It's metaphorical language—Mother God, Father God, Great Spirit, Source of All, Spirit of Life—use whatever name you like—it's all metaphor. If you choose to imagine God as a being in the sky or within all, or embodied as a guru, or in the Buddha nature, or present in an icon from the Catholic or Orthodox tradition, that's fine—because it's all acknowledging the same search for connection with Source. In other language, we're all reaching for Wholeness. We're human and imperfect, and there's this longing to be whole, of being part of something larger. We're reaching out in different ways, and that's what we have in common, the longing in all people, in all times, in all places, even if we sometimes disavow that longing.



What is wholeness? What it's not is the modern world views of separation and duality, things like mind and body, sacred and secular, person and environment, and spirituality and social transformation. A truly holistic world view affirms the insights of complementary and mind-body medicine and contemporary physics, all of which describe the relationship of mind, body, and spirit as part of one whole, interdependent reality in which spirituality shapes embodiment and embodiment shapes spirituality. One of the most spiritual of our UU principles refers to our interdependent web of life, which when deeply lived recognizes that there really is no other. We are all interconnected.

In the experience of public, collective wholeness, we are transformed personally, so that we can reclaim the inner integrity of our true nature. Wholeness assists us in cultivating the remarkable experience of being fully present in the moment and at one with all of Life itself. We acknowledge our unique individuality and our collective belonging. This wholeness, this connection with all of life including the rhythms of Nature is sometimes best seen as Pagan and Earth Centered. It may be unfamiliar to people of intellectually/rationally oriented Western cultures. For those of you who wish for a more integrated experience of your spirituality, I highly recommend the Celestial Celebrations Circles held here on a regular basis.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow describes people who are psychologically and spiritually healthy as self-actualizing people. They are, without exception, engaged with and involved in a cause, in a life outside

their own skins, in something larger than themselves. They are devoted, working at something very precious to them—some calling or vocation. They are working at something which they love, so that the personal-public, individual-collective dichotomy in them disappears.

The rarity of finding a meaningful calling and work is at the root of our World's despair and sorrow. When not acknowledged and embraced, our grief is acted out through violence, against ourselves, each other, and toward the environment. Unacknowledged grief also manifests as depression, anxiety, and a growing sense of meaninglessness.

By acknowledging our grief over the absence of a vision or a task or both, we take the first steps toward finding our sacred work. We begin to choose life and return to our true nature—that of wholeness and aliveness.

Our New Assistant Minister

By Rev. Nell Newton

Here I am! I've set up my office and received a full set of keys to the campus. Now what?

When starting something new, I like to approach with curiosity and humility. I will spend a lot of time listening, asking questions, seeking clarification, and providing background context. And, still, there will be a learning curve in all directions. I've never served as an Assistant Minister, and you've never had an Assistant Minister. Rev. Mark and I have never worked as a ministerial team before. Inevitably there will be questions, missteps, absurdity, and confusion.

So, what, exactly, will I be doing? As the Assistant Minister, I will be taking up some of the work that previously was carried by Rev. Mark. I will be the ministerial contact person to work with many committees. Here are the main areas where I will be working:

Membership, Member Care, and Pastoral Care: including providing pastoral care and visits, supporting the work of the committees, coordinating training for our many volunteers, and welcoming in new members.

Justice Work: serving as the ministerial liaison to our many justice endeavors, including UU The Vote, Racial Justice & Black Lives Matter, and Share the Plate.

Religious Education: including teaching Adult RE classes, serving as the ministerial liaison to Children & Youth RE, and supporting the DLRE in designing and supporting the RE programming.



Of course, I will also be involved in supporting the governance of the church, preparing worship at least six times a year, and carrying our faith forward through involvement with the UUA and UU Minister's Association.

What will this look like for you, as an individual? It means that I might be at your next meeting. Or, if you ask Rev. Mark for something, he might redirect you over to me for faster assistance. You might choose to reach out to me directly for pastoral care or work with me to coordinate rites.

What will this look like for the entire congregation? Ideally, my work will result in freeing up Rev. Mark's attention and time for Worship, Stewardship, and Planning. Hopefully, by working as a team we will have more great ideas, more energy, and more joy for the work of this congregation! Still curious? Let's have tea and learn more together.

Farewell Beloved Community

By Dr. Sheri Phillabaum

On Sunday, May 29, I took my leave as your Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE). I enjoyed seeing so many of you in church for the service, and afterwards on the patio as we said our goodbyes. In this article I want to once more say good-bye and take the opportunity to thank this community for all of your support over the years.

Thank you to everyone who has volunteered in any capacity in religious education for children and youth. I understand that when you have companioned with children and youth you have not done it for *me*; you've done it for the youth, for yourself, for First UU San Antonio, for the UU faith, and for the betterment of the world. You've done it because you understand that children and youth are not the future of this church. They are its present. And still, even though I know you haven't done these things for me personally, I feel personally grateful to you.



Thank you to the children and youth for being who you are! I doubt many children or youth read this message, so I hope that some parents will show this to them, or just convey the message that every single child and youth in this community is a special gift. Some bring brilliance, some bring joy, some bring exuberance. Others bring thoughtfulness, and still others bring a passion for justice. Every child, whatever gifts they bring, is a treasure, and deserves to be treasured by this community.

Thank you to the facilitators of adult religious education classes. You are key to perpetuating the tradition of this liberal religious faith. I appreciate the time and effort that it takes to prepare, present, and facilitate. I know that if all this were easy, a lot more people would be willing to do it! As it is, talented, effective, *willing* adult RE facilitators are scarce, and therefore especially valuable and valued.

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to attend adult religious education classes. A church is strengthened by people who understand its philosophy, theology, and history.

Thank you to the covenant-group facilitators. One of the greatest needs in our society is spaces where people can feel seen, heard, and appreciated for who they are. You create these spaces. I know it can be difficult to make room in your lives for the time commitment involved in facilitating a small group, and I'm grateful that you have seen the need and the value and made the time. It has been a pleasure to work with each of you.

Thank you to the participants of covenant groups. You provide the listening ears and attentive hearts that are the gift of the groups.

Of course, I must thank the staff for their collegiality. To a person, the staff of First UU San Antonio are committed to their work and helpful to one another. On this staff we have few artificial walls of "This is MY job" and "This is NOT my job." I have always known that every staff member would "have my back," whatever challenges might arise

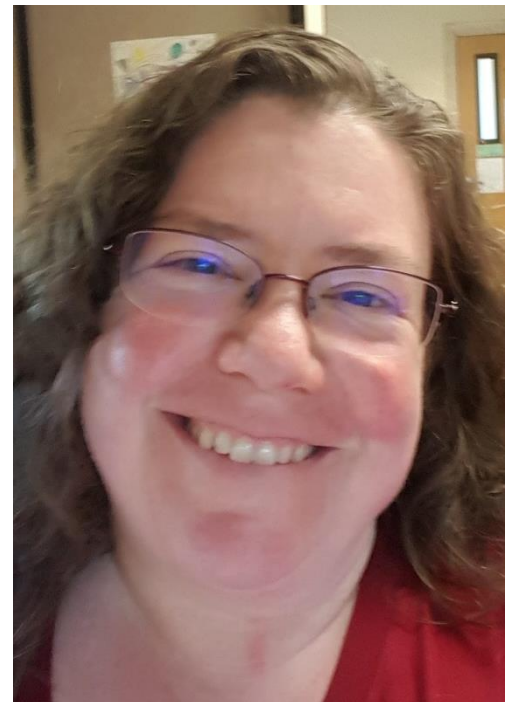
There are many more individuals and groups to whom I owe gratitude. I hope you know who you are, and that you are appreciated!

Our New DLRE

By Bridget Laflin

Hello First UU San Antonio! My name is Bridget Laflin. I use (she/her) pronouns. I am honored to have been selected to serve as your next Director of Lifespan Religious Education (DLRE.) I will be starting on August 1, so the next couple of months will be filled with lots of changes as I move to San Antonio from the Seattle, WA area. I currently serve as DRE at Woodinville UU Church in Woodinville, WA where I have worked for 3 years. I live in Shoreline, WA with my husband, Jason; my daughter, Meg (age 23); and my son, Quincy (age 18). Quincy will be starting college at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in the fall. Jason and Meg will be moving with me to San Antonio.

I grew up in Pierre, SD as a Roman Catholic. I spent my senior year in high school as an exchange student in Austria. When I returned, I went to the University of South Dakota for one year, then transferred to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. I graduated with a BA in Theater Arts emphasis on management and directing. While I lived in Minneapolis, I met my (now) husband, Jason. We moved to the Seattle area, where we lived for 10 years. During that time, we started an improv comedy troupe, adopted our son, and I worked in the aviation insurance industry. Then my company closed their Seattle office and moved us to the Chicago area where we lived for 6 years, during which time we adopted our daughter. We then moved back to the Seattle area, where I began my Master of Divinity degree program at Seattle University's School of Theology and Ministry. I will be graduating on June 12 with my Master's. My son will be graduating from high school on the same day. For fun, I make LEGO mosaic art, do improv comedy, watch way too much TV, and I am a huge Star Trek nerd. Now you're all caught up! I can't wait to get to know all of you!



Board of Trustees: 2021/2022 Annual Report

By Gale Morrow, Board President

The 2021/2022 First UU Board of Trustees started the year in June 2021 without a Vice President. Maintenance and Repair chair Ron Peña stepped in to fill the void. At our annual retreat in August, we developed the following goals that would guide us through the year:

- Increase transparency and accountability in all financial aspects of the church
- Improve and Maintain the First UU Campus
- Support the Ministerial Searches
- Grow and Sustain Congregational Membership
- Update Governance Policy and Processes

The Board proposed changes to our bylaws this spring. In summary form, these changes include changing some wording for the sake of consistency; correcting a few grammatical errors; changing personal pronouns from he or she to they; referring to the minister referenced in the bylaws as the lead minister (as we now have two ministers); and changing the name of the Committee on Ministry to the Committee on Shared Ministry (at the request of the Committee). At our May 22nd Congregational Meeting, the congregation voted to approve these changes.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has progressed, we transitioned from on-line pre-recorded services (available on YouTube) to hybrid services that are live streamed and in-person in our Sanctuary. We have heeded the advice of our COVID task force and continue to recommend (but do not require) that people attending indoor events, including services, in person wear masks.

The Board has offered also offered Listening Sessions during the year, hoping to hear from you about your interests for and questions about the church. These were offered in September, November and March by Zoom and in person. The November session focused on the ministerial search process and in March our treasurer, Debra Loya, and the Stewardship Committee discussed our aspirational budget for the upcoming year.

As a result of the Board Listening Session in November, we worked with the Leadership Development Committee (LDC) to discuss the best process for us to use for our upcoming ministerial search. The LDC hosted a focus group with available members of our past two ministerial search committees to get their input on the process. While they appreciated the opportunity to get to work closely with others on such an important job, they were universal in their support of the contract to call process that does not involve the expense and time of the traditional UUA search process. Starting in our next church year, the Board will actively engage with the congregation about this topic so they will know your interests and preferences for moving forward.

One ministerial search has been completed this year, and we have signed a contract with Rev. Nell Newton to serve as our Assistant Minister. Her contract began on May 1, 2022, and her first Sunday in the pulpit was May 15. Please join the Board in welcoming Rev. Nell to San Antonio and her new job.

The Capital Campaign Committee has worked hard this year. Their efforts have resulted in a contract with an architectural firm to begin the pre-design phase of the much-needed improvements to our campus. One of our accomplishments is the establishment of a special bank account that will allow us to accept stocks as donations to the campaign. The Campaign will kick off in earnest in September 2022.

This year we also changed our cleaning and grounds maintenance work after Jose Castillo's retirement. As a result, we now have contracts with companies who will provide these services for us. Keeping our facilities clean and the grounds in good shape are important to your enjoyment of our campus. We are happy to report that the city of Balcones Heights recently repaired a major pothole on Gill Road, adjacent to our campus. We also have new contracts for maintaining our heating and cooling systems on the campus. We hope to avoid air conditioning problems in the heat of the San Antonio summer.

As we close out this church year, I would like to thank the members of the Board who worked tirelessly on your behalf. They are Ron Peña, Vice President; Debra Loya, Treasurer; Troy Peters, Secretary; and members at large Danielle Bess, Oscar Solis, Vicki Tullius and Terry Palin.

Capital Campaign Off to Good Start

By Tina Solis

The Capital Campaign Committee (CCC), formed in 2021, has been hard at work in assessing the Church's financial needs for an enhanced campus. Based on initial meetings with our architect and other studies, we have determined that we need to raise \$2.3M. To date, we secured about \$650,000 in commitments. That is a good start, but we need your help to achieve our goals. Such goals, we hope, will include remodeling the kitchen, updating restrooms to be in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, replacing obsolescent HVAC systems, procuring updated telecommunication systems, and painting and decorating meeting and classrooms. These are all updates and improvements church members have expressed interest in that are not covered under the church's Operating Budget funded by your pledge dollars.

The CCC hosted 3 focus group sessions with congregants (October and December of 2021 and one in January 2022) to gather input and support for current capital needs of our church. We also reviewed focus group assessments completed a few years ago. Pulling in experts from our own community, several physical walk-throughs and hands-on assessments have been completed in order to determine our needs.

The CCC has been in "Phase One" of the campaign since January 2022 and has secured several significant commitments. We have hired the architectural firm of Derrick Architects that has provided an initial assessment of the entire project(s) and an estimate of costs. This firm will design the projects, coordinate construction, and oversee all contracted construction with trades and specialties such as mechanical, electrical and plumbing.

The "Public Phase" of the campaign will kick off in September 2022 with several events to be announced in August. This phase of the campaign will generally run through December of 2022. Capital Campaign commitments may be spread out over 36 months beginning January 2023. Several Capital Campaign Stewards will be available throughout to help congregants fully understand different ways to contribute. In addition to cash gifts, stocks, bonds, even real estate can be considered as gifts. Another popular

mechanism is a Qualified Charitable Deduction (QDC) from your IRA that avoids taxes on your contribution if you are over 70 1/2.

It is important for the congregation to understand that contributions to this campaign are IN ADDITION to annual stewardship pledges. Stewardship pledges should not and may not be used to fund Capital needs. Every congregant and family has a different ability to give and it is hoped that commitments be made commensurate with those abilities. The CCC is, in general, requesting that all consider a commitment range of between 2X to 5X one's annual stewardship pledge. An example would be if your annual pledge is \$1200, your capital commitment might be \$2400 - \$6000 in payments spread out over 36 months. All payments are due in full by December 2025, but we encourage early funding to meet outgoing costs. Determining commitments will be vital in our ability to proceed with needed work soon, since the church has been able to secure a bank loan to begin work based upon those commitments. The goal is to complete much needed repairs, remodeling, updates without a mortgage. This is an exciting time for our church and its future!

A Visit to SAAACAM

By Mary Barad

Members of the Racial Justice-Black Lives Matter Group visited the San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum (SAAACAM) on March 6, 2022. SAAACAM is a nonprofit organization with a mission to collect, maintain, disseminate, and interpret authentic African American artifacts related to San Antonio history, and operates the museum in a quaint physical space at 218 S. Presa, Bldg. 20, La Villita Square in downtown San Antonio.

Before entering, we sat outside on the "front porch" for a while, waiting for the other members of our group. There were a couple of rocking chairs, and the experience really prepared us for "our trip back in time," once we were inside.

We were received warmly and were provided an excellent introduction to the facility and a tour. It is a small space, so the docent was willing to leave her post at the front desk to help us and was still able to greet other guests.



The African American cultural heritage of the San Antonio region is intricately tied to the stories of Spaniards, Mexicans, Germans, and Canary Island populations who also helped build our city. The collective legacies of pioneering Black families serve as the basis of the museum collection, and the development of the archive is community driven and ongoing. The archive is compiled and interpreted in the context of the entire City of San Antonio and throughout Bexar County.

SAAACAM exhibits change frequently, and they also sponsor many community events like films, Black History River tours along the Riverwalk, and Cemetery tours. Often, they partner with other area cultural institutions, businesses, and colleges and universities.

Please plan to visit and check the website frequently to participate in activities which support the Museum and the San Antonio African American Community. <https://saaacam.org/>

CREF Nominations Needed

By Diane Carl

JUNE is the month to nominate your choice for a 2022 CREF Award! Church members may nominate a non-profit organization that meets the following criteria:

- Nominated by a church member
- Reflects the values of our church
- For charitable, religious, educational, or scientific purposes
- A project under 2 years and limited to the San Antonio Metropolitan Area
- Organizations must be 501(c)(3)

40 Years!! Since 1982 the First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Antonio has managed and administered the Community Responsibility Endowment Fund (CREF). Each year the elected CREF Trustees award grants to support projects or activities in our local community.

Organizations applying for grants will be asked to provide the following:

- Background information: physical location and directors, mission and/or purpose, and a brief history of the organization
- Information about the activity/project: description, how it will be carried out, project costs and need for funds
- Project timeline and completion dates
- Expected project outcomes: impact on community and its betterment, specific alignment with any UU principle.

Please give anytime! Visit our website at www.uusat.org and click on the DONATE button. Once on the donation page, enter your donation in the CREF box. Thank you for supporting our community philanthropy.

In the fall, CREF conducts its annual fundraising drive to raise money to grow the CREF endowment and increase the amount of earnings CREF has to award for grants in future years. Our donations for 2021-2022 year were at a 40 year low at just over \$300. Please consider a donation now which will contribute to the principle of the fund.

Asylum-Seekers in San Antonio: First UU and the Interfaith Welcome Coalition

By Mary Grace Ketner



Passing through San Antonio's transportation hubs these days are people from Venezuela, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Republic of Congo, Angola, and—yes—Ukraine, as well as from the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras). They come by bus directly from the border or by van from ICE detention centers at Karnes, Dilley, or Pearsall. Greeting and assisting them are volunteers from the Interfaith Welcome Coalition, (<https://interfaithwelcomecoalition.org>) an organization with a mission to welcome the stranger and walk with them on their journey.

The Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC) is grateful for the generous participation of First Unitarian Universalist Church. First UU volunteers strengthen IWC's capabilities and its financial support through CREF and Share the Plate and in assisting in the purchase of backpacks and travel supplies. First UU

also provided shelter on its campus for two families last summer, an act which clearly carries out the spirit of First UU's covenant and UU principles. You have recognized IWC with Courageous Love Awards to the founder, Rev. Kelly Allen, and its strong leader, Sr. Denise LaRock, as well as to City Manager Erik Walsh for his immediate and strong response to the 2019 surge.

IWC originated with the 2014 surge of unaccompanied children, and First UU support came on quickly in 2015 and 2016 when the UU College of Social Justice sought local housing for volunteer lawyers and Spanish interpreters, and members of First UU responded with open homes and open hearts.

This past year IWC volunteers assisted an average of 7,000 individuals a month at the Greyhound bus station and San Antonio International



Laredo's Holding Institute, a ministry of United Methodist Women, an IWC partner at the border.

Airport. Working closely with Catholic Charities, IWC provided shelter for persons waiting overnight for their bus departure or flight; it supports families of new babies or hospitalized members with housing, groceries, and with volunteer attention to their needs until they can move on to their families or sponsors around the United States.

IWC coordinates locally with faith partners such as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, the Episcopal Office of Immigration and Refugee Ministries, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the (Methodist) Rio Texas Disaster Response Team, and Catholic Charities, as well as with the UUSC and the UU Office of Social Justice. IWC is grateful for grants from small and large charities, and it receives reimbursement for some costs from FEMA.



IWC's Food Coordinator Mary Lance and First UU volunteer Moon Sanchez Brand unload lunches at the Bus Station.

IWC maintains collaborative ties with the City of San Antonio Office of the Immigration Liaison, RAICES, American Gateways, the Migrant Center for Human Rights, the San Antonio Food Bank, the Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights, SASTands, the Center for Refugee Services, and the local American Organization for Immigrants. The organization participates in planning and problem-solving with the Texas Border Collaboration Network and the Mid-Texas Welcoming Committee and coordinates with non-governmental organizations and shelters on both sides of the border. Nationally, IWC belongs to the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, a membership group, and works closely with Church World Service, and others. IWC also nurtures and maintains respectful conversations with ICE and Border Patrol.

IWC became a 501(c)(3) in 2021 and now employs a full-time Coordinating Director, Tori Salas, and a part-time Volunteer Coordinator, Molly Hardwick, and also contributes to the

salary of the Children's Coordinator of the Respite Center at the San Antonio Mennonite Church, Kabibi Safir. The IWC Board meets monthly and includes two members of First UU, Donna Pereira and Mary Grace Ketner. First UU's Moon Sanchez Brand coordinates IWC's Accompaniment and Shelter programs, and other First UU members volunteer in different ways.

In addition to service, IWC takes a lead in Advocacy. One regular feature is "Take Five," which invites people through Facebook, Twitter, and its newsletter to take five minutes to do a small task such as sign a petition, make a phone call, or send an email. Current issues include opposition to Operation LoneStar and Title 42. The Advocacy Committee studies each issue and outlines a position, then invites participation by IWC volunteers and supporters. In addition, that committee prepares helpful documents such as "Things you need to know about Haiti" (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PxET->

[zv0aS STbVK nFtL 0aBQF66uYGFUxf3HTj8c/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vTbC6atg13t8KMwpupYyujRjH8S-iMBRd02JArUsQoQgYEt8O1Cij1sWUK3GFY1HQ/pub)) or a position statement on Title 42 (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vTbC6atg13t8KMwpupYyujRjH8S-iMBRd02JArUsQoQgYEt8O1Cij1sWUK3GFY1HQ/pub>)

IWC continues to seek volunteers for weekly shifts at the airport or bus station, assisting asylum-seekers and distributing our signature backpacks, but there are other ways to help. Presently the organization is seeking meal delivery volunteers. This job involves picking up meals at the SA Food Bank distribution center at Haven for Hope one morning a week and delivering them to the airport or bus station. The delivery consists of 200 meal portions which fit in the trunk of a car. If interested, contact iwcvolunteercoord@interfaithwelcomecoalition.org



It has been a while since IWC's Advocacy Committee has been able to plan a rally, but the group has developed new ways to support compassionate care of immigrant families.

IWC general meetings occur monthly by zoom on the second Thursday morning and are open to all. They consist of a speaker from one of our partner organizations, reports from our teams, and announcements from partner organizations. Learn more about IWC at <http://interfaithwelcomecoalition.org> or subscribe to our biweekly newsletter there. You can also follow IWC on Facebook to view activities, invitations, and immigration news.

San Antonio's IWC work continues as more and more Americans see and respond to what is happening at our border. By supporting a reliable local organization rather than starting and trying to maintain our own small group, First UU's Social Justice Committee redoubles the congregation's impact. Through IWC, we are able to live out our values and our commitment to the inherent worth and dignity of every human being, to justice, equity, and compassion, and to the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

General Assembly 2022

By Mary Wright

This year's General Assembly takes place June 22-26 and it's not too late to register. General Assembly 2022 will be a multiplatform event, with registration options for in-person and/or virtual participation. In-person registration includes access to events scheduled to take place in Portland, Oregon, as well as everything available to virtual registrants. Full virtual registration includes access to the GA app, as well as all on-demand programming, live webinars, and live-streamed events. Visit www.uua.org/ga/registration for more information and to register.

UU the VOTE SA

By Renee Wood

First UU San Antonio's UU the Vote Coordinating Team held its first meeting on May 11th, and we expect this to be the first of many planning and organizing activities to be held this all-important election year.

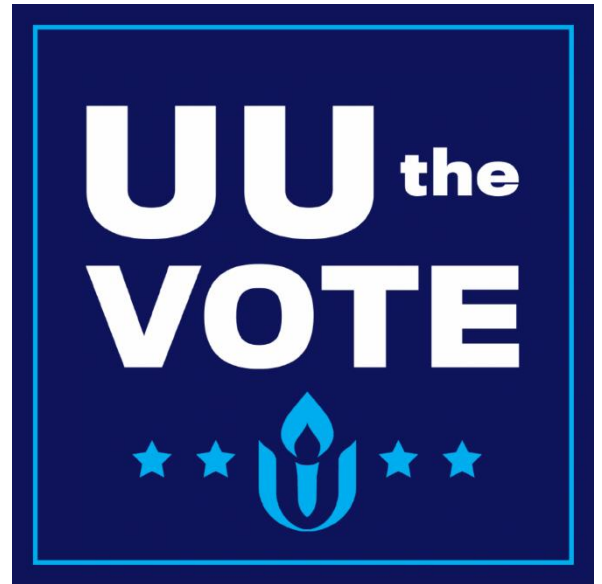
UU the Vote is a nationwide initiative of the Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA's) *Side With Love* social justice campaign that first launched prior to the 2020 election. This is a "non-partisan faith initiative to engage our neighbors, educate our communities, mobilize voters, and rally around key ballot initiatives." (For more information on the nationwide initiative, visit

www.uuthevote.org) Like many UU congregations, First

UU SA now has our own working group. Each

congregation decides its own emphasis and plan with the

same goals in mind. In this time of political divisiveness and ongoing "culture wars" it is imperative that we work to save our democracy—a democracy that is under attack on multiple fronts.



We have identified five areas our team is most interested in pursuing. These are: encouraging more participation in elections through Get Out the Vote (GOTV) activities; registering new voters; providing education about the elections, voting, and issues; partnering with other organizations; and focusing on youth/young voters.

The team members are Jan Realini, Renee Wood, Arlis Olson, Mary Ellen Coughlan, Mary Barad, Desiree Kannel, and Rev. Nell Newton. If you are interested in becoming involved in this important work, you can contact Renee Wood at jrjmwood4@gmail.com. We will need lots of help from members and friends to maximize our congregation's impact. Commitments of time and energy will vary depending on the time of year and area of interest. GOTV activities like postcard- and letter-writing happen closer to election day (but you can get started early). Registering new voters is a year-round process but can be done on specific dates at select locations. We are wanting to register new young voters, and we hope to partner with young UUs and their friends. Whether you can commit for just a few hours or for longer amounts of time, we would love for you to participate in this important work in an area of interest and capacity that works for you.

There are other areas beyond First UU SA that also need volunteers and can have a direct impact on our democratic process. If you are interested in working as an Election Judge or Clerk, you can find information at [Bexar County Elections](#). They also have great need for [Volunteer Deputy Registrars](#). The county provides training and materials and it's a great way to learn more about the election process. If you want more information before applying, contact Renee Wood at jrjmwood4@gmail.com

Now more than ever, each of us needs to do what we can to support our democratic process. Thank you for helping UU the Vote SA do all we can to save democracy.

YRE Sunday 2022

By Sheri Phillabaum

This year, Youth Religious Education returned to the Sanctuary for the first in-person “YRE Sunday” worship service since 2019!

Classes from pre-K through middle school and several of their adult guides led the congregation in songs and told them about some of the topics they've explored throughout the year.

Religious education teacher Kathy Beggs told a story from an elementary curriculum, and middle school social justice teacher Esperanza Garza provided the anthem and offertory songs.

The morning included a celebration of “bridging” youth - those who have “aged out” of the high school youth program and all religious education volunteers were recognized with a small gift.



This year's bridging youth from left to right: Ben Fry (child of Tess Bobo & Lon Fry), Maia Meneses (child of Nicole & Ron Meneses), Claire Blood-Palin (child of Randy Blood & Terry Palin), and Ronnie Peters (child of Anne & Troy Peters).



Youth Awards 2022

By Sheri Phillabaum

Each year First UU San Antonio bestows two awards on emerging adults in the congregation: the Wade Richmond Scholarship and the Liz Garrison Award.

The Wade Richmond Scholarship goes to a high school senior who has distinguished themselves through active involvement in our church community as well as academic achievement and admirable personal characteristics similar to those of the late Wade Richmond, for whom the scholarship is named. The scholarship is made possible by the late Jack and Laura Richmond, long-time members, and parents of Wade. This year the Richmond's son Steve was able to attend on May 8 and greet the 2022 recipient: Claire Blood-Palin.

Claire says, "Thanks so much to the Richmond family for offering this scholarship, and thanks to First UU for providing this opportunity. I will be graduating from Anne Frank Inspire Academy, in which I was in National Honor Society, TNT (Teens Needing Time, a peer mentorship program), and TAFE (Texas Association for Future Educators). I will be attending The University of the Incarnate Word this fall where I will be studying elementary education. I've been at the church since I was 6 and will be taking my experience from church and the UU principles with me into college and beyond. I'm so grateful for this opportunity I've been given. Thank you.



Steve Richmond and Claire Blood-Palin, the 2022 Wade Richmond Scholarship recipient



Jean Daniels and Maia Meneses, the 2022 Liz Garrison Award recipient

The Liz Garrison Award was established by Jean Daniels and the late Ed Garrison in honor of their late daughter Elizabeth. It is designed to help an emerging adult launch into young adulthood. The recipient must possess the basic personal qualities that Liz Garrison had and admired: compassion with an interest in furthering causes of social justice, including LGBTQ+ rights. Jean Daniels attended the worship service on May 8 and stayed after for the cake reception and to meet this year's recipient: Maia Meneses.

Maia is the daughter of Nicole and Ron Meneses and has been attending First UU San Antonio since she was three years old. She will graduate Summa Cum Laude from the International School of the Americas, where she was a participant in the National Honors Society (NHS), Model United Nations San Antonio (MUNSA), and has completed her senior year internship with an art gallery downtown. Maia will be attending Texas State next fall where she plans to major in art, and she is looking forward to all that the future has to offer. Congratulations, Maia and Claire!

Trust Fund for Endowments

By Arlis Olson

Spring Donations

February: Bill & Katy Evans – undesignated; ClaudiaGlass – in honor of Charles Bowden; Gail Reinhart – birthday match.

March: Diane Duesterhoeft & Mike Phillips, A.M. or M.R. Miller, and Alexander Miller – in honor of Charles Bowden; Claudia Glass -in honor of Rowena Rodgers; Bill & Katy” Evans and Brian Wade Evans – undesignated; Darcy Walker – birthday match.

April: Patricia Milano and Arlis Olson – in honor of Charles Bowden; Rev Mark & Carolyn Skrabacz – birthday match.

The First UU Endowment Fund was established in 1972 to provide financial stability and funding for special church needs, maintenance, and improvements. Sufficient funds in this account help support the long-term viability of the church.

Optimally, everyone should consider the church in their estate planning. See your estate planning attorney or financial adviser to determine what is right for you. You may ask the church for a list of those professionals who are members. This is where large donations usually are made. Please ensure you have a Life Transition Form in the church file. In the meantime, these small gifts “in memoriam” and for birthdays really help. Almost everyone can afford to make a small donation commemorating their birthday. This month your contributions increased this fund by \$897.00.



Meet Our ASL Interpreter

By Sami Gniazdowski

Hello! I am Samantha (Sami) Gniazdowski. You may have seen me on stage interpreting at church. I was born and raised in California and moved to Texas about 9 years ago. I graduated from San Antonio college with a degree in sign language interpreting and got an enhanced certificate in educational interpreting in May of 2017. I then went on to become a certified Sign Language Interpreter. Since becoming certified, I have been working in a variety of settings. In June of 2020 I became a full-time video relay interpreter. I now interpret phone calls for deaf and hard of hearing individuals all over the country. It is safe to say I love my job! I’ve been married to my best friend for 8 years and we have a beautiful 4 ½ year old daughter.

Share The Plate Results for 2022-23

By Maria Bush

The following organizations received the most votes and will be the recipients of a Share the Plate (STP) this year:

Healthy Futures-Healthy Futures is dedicated to reducing teen and unplanned pregnancy. They provide and promote sex education for youth and have a big and expanding project for community colleges in San Antonio. In addition, Healthy Futures' statewide project, the Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition, is an influential advocacy group for access to preventive care, including contraception. Website: www.HF-TX.org, Nominated by Jan Realini

Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC)-IWC volunteers, including over two dozen First UU members, welcome immigrant families passing through San Antonio's airport and bus station on their way to join their families or sponsors in the United States, orienting them, assisting with ticketing, and providing food, travel supplies, and, if needed, overnight shelter. Website: <https://interfaithwelcomecoalition.org/>, Nominated by Mary Grace Ketner

PFLAG-PFLAG builds on the foundation of loving families united with LGBTQ+ people and allies who support one another, to educate ourselves and our communities to speak up as advocates until all hearts and minds respect, value and affirm LGBTQ+ people. Website: <https://pflagsanantonio.org/>, Nominated by Terry Palin

Roy Maas Youth Alternatives-Roy Maas helps children in crisis navigate through the trauma of physical and sexual abuse, abandonment, and neglect by providing them a safe, supervised residential setting, an on-campus accredited school, medical care, enrichment programs, life skills, and counseling to help break the cycle of abuse and violence. Website: <https://rmya.org>, Nominated by Carol Collins

The schedule for STP is:

June 19 – UBarU

July 17 – Facilities

August 21 – Roy Maas Youth Alternatives

Sept 18 – Healthy Futures

October 16 – CREF

Nov 20 – Facilities

Dec 24 – Minister's Discretionary Fund

Jan 15 – Interfaith Welcome Coalition

Feb 19 – Facilities

March 19 – PFLAG

April 16 – Facilities

May 21 – Trust Fund for Endowments

Thanks for your continued participation and support.

Celestial Celebrations Circle Spring Happenings

By Sylvia Wheeler

Celestial Celebrations Circle hosted 2 rituals this Spring. We celebrated Ostara/Spring Equinox & Beltane.

Spring Equinox (equinox = equi - equal & nox - short for night and day) is an astronomical occurrence that happens each year to mark the shift to more light than dark, that is, the sunlight now becomes more predominate than the darkness of the moon. In ancient agricultural societies, it was celebrated for the beneficial effects it had on crops and animals, as more sunlight helped both thrive. In the 3 major monotheistic religions, Spring Equinox plays an important role in each of their major feast days of Ramadan (Islamic), Passover (Judaism) and Easter (Christianity). The power of Spring Equinox was forcefully shown this year in the Middle East as all three of these feasts appeared around the same time. The geographic areas where these three religions overlapped became somewhat of a battle zone as the celebrants bumped into one another. Another name for the Spring Equinox is Ostara. Also spelled Eastre, it lends its name to the Christian Easter holiday.



Our other observed ritual is agriculturally based as well. Beltane is also an ancient observance of crops and animals. But this time, it is for reproduction - for a bountiful harvest and for baby animals and hopefully, human fertility. On 'May Eve' night, one fire would be lit on a mountain top. When it could be seen on other mountain tops, more fires would be lit and the process would continue. These fires were an imitation of the ever-strengthening Sun. It was hoped that the fires would please the rising sun and show that it was appreciated. Today, in many countries, Beltane has become a major holiday called May Day (May 1st) and is celebrated with elaborate parades. Also, in many places, it is a day to honor/celebrate all kinds of workers. Beltane is what we call a big blow out ritual for Celestial Celebrations Circle. It is only eclipsed by Samhain, which is on the opposite side of the Wheel of the Year. We put up a Maypole - which is the ultimate phallic symbol - around which we chant and dance. Afterwards, we light a small fire and encourage celebrants to 'jump' the Bell Fire for good luck in the coming year. People are free to 'jump' the fire with many individuals at once to strengthen relationships with those people.

Celestial Celebrations Circle members participated in many church programs this spring. We helped erect a Maypole for children's Religious Education where we emphasized the community aspect of participating in this activity - as opposed to the adult meaning. We participated in an Adult Religious Education Class via Zoom discussing the Sixth Source of UU Principles & Purposes - Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions. We also participated in a discussion of Paganism with Trinity University students in the Margaret B. Parker Chapel.

For more information about the Celestial Celebrations Circle visit the church website at www.uusat.org/celestial-celebrations-circle or visit our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/celestialcelebrationscircle

Blessing of the Animals

By Mary Wright

On April 10th our Sanctuary was bustling with creatures as we welcomed the return of our “Blessing of the Animals” worship service. The service featured in person and videotaped testimonials from church members Stanna Welch, Lottie & Ava Beggs, Gina Humble, Karen Davis, and Donna Pereira. Rev. Mark provided an Animal Blessing homily and then individual greeted and blessed each animal, with help from our assistant DLRE, Glenna Kachtik.



Honoring Those Lost to Police Violence

By John Faultersack

On March 27th Black Lives & Allies for Community (BLAC) organized a potluck dinner held on the patio at First UU, honoring the folks who lost loved ones to police violence. It couldn't get much simpler than the potluck format: each family/attendee brought a dish to share with the group. There were approximately 30 Church members in attendance, along with one honored family member, Diane Bush. A gallery of pictures of some of the victims surrounded the patio. The weather was delightful, children's games were furnished, and a good time was had by all. Future such events are planned, so stay tuned!

BLAC is a community organization founded by church member, Rico Espinoza. Their goal is to establish a community for Black people and allies to come together. They host virtual and in-person events, exchange ideas, express ourselves, and form a united response to injustice.

Easter Egg Hunt Returns to First UU

By Mary Wright

After a two-year hiatus due to COVID, First UU held an in-person Egg hunt on the playground following Easter Worship Service. The kids had a great time gathering and searching for eggs. They did some social justice work as well. Some of the hidden eggs contained monetary pledges. The children had several different organizations they could pick from to donate the money. They ended up raising several hundred dollars for various organizations.



Farewell Sheri and Roy

By Mary Wright



Our beloved Director of Lifespan Religious Educator, Sheri Phillabaum, officially retired on May 29th. Sheri held this position at First UU for 14 ½ years. During that time she has helped to educate countless adults and youth about Unitarian Universalism and UU values. Per UUA guidelines, Sheri and her husband Roy Ellzey, must step away from the church for a while. Roy has also been of great service for the church over the years through his volunteering with our Facilities group and singing in the choir. Both Sheri and Roy have been incredibly active with UBarU Camp & Conference Center over the years, and I am sure that will continue. A reception was held on the patio on Sheri's last day, May 29th, to say farewell. Sheri and Roy, you will be greatly missed.

Star Dust

By Roy Ellzey (August 2015)

From star dust we came, and to star dust we'll go,
Though it may take billions of years or so.
What happens between no one can really know,
Because it started so very, very long ago.

Religions often speak of a special place
Where souls reunite beyond time and space,
Where dreams are filled with loved ones once more;
But can this be truth, or just ancient lore?

Yet I wonder, what becomes of a dream
That from our hearts and minds did stream?
What happens to thoughts, love, or perhaps awe
From an experience lived, or something we saw?

Is a thought just physics and chemistry,
Or part of living things that is much a mystery?
It seems for such, the more we learn the less we know;
And in our search for that truth, this is clearly so.

Still, most of us live our lives as best we can,
Which seems true for every child, woman, or man.
Though some may excel in our brief time, all should know,
From star dust we came, and to star dust we'll go.



Condolences

...to the family and friends of Charles Bowden who passed away on March 1, 2022. Follow this link to read his obituary: [DR. CHARLES BOWDEN Obituary \(2022\) - San Antonio, TX - San Antonio Express-News \(legacy.com\)](#)

...to the family and friends of Chris Price, older brother of Scott Emerson-Price, who passed away on March 28, 2022. Follow this link to read his obituary: [CHRISTOPHER PRICE Obituary \(1957 - 2022\) - San Antonio, TX - San Antonio Express-News \(legacy.com\)](#)

...to the family and friends of Scott Chandler, older brother of Tim Chandler, who passed away on April, 17, 2022. Follow this link to read his obituary: [Obituary | Oliver Scott Chandler of Jasper, Texas | Stringer & Griffin Funeral Home \(stringerandgriffin.com\)](#)

...to the family and friends of Michael Cadieux, brother of Nicole Meneses, who passed away on April 26, 2022. Follow this link to read his obituary: [Michael Cadieux Obituary - Bloomington, IL \(dignitymemorial.com\)](#)

...to the family and friends of Virginia Bowden who passed away on May 2, 2022. Follow this link to read her obituary: [VIRGINIA BOWDEN Obituary \(2022\) - San Antonio, TX - San Antonio Express-News \(legacy.com\)](#)

If you have a milestone you would like to share in our next newsletter, contact
newsletter@uusat.org

We are a Compassionate Congregation

We encourage San Antonio to be a more compassionate city.

We are a Green Sanctuary Congregation.

We develop our congregation's environmental ethic through worship, education, sustainability, and environmental justice.

We are a Racial Justice Congregation.

We are a congregation committed to racial equity and justice, within ourselves, our church and the wider community.

We are a Reproductive Justice Congregation.

We stand for the right to make one's own reproductive decisions.

We are a Sanctuary Congregation.

We protect and defend refugees, asylum seekers, and at-risk immigrants.

We are a Welcoming Congregation.

Families and individuals of all sexual orientations and gender identities contribute to the joyful life of this church.

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