

WINTER 2023

# INSPIRE

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THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF  
FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF SAN ANTONIO





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## Inspire

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### Cover photo:

T-shirts on display on the frontage road outside the Sanctuary. Each shirt represents one life lost to gun violence. The white shirts represent those lost to suicide.

# The Loud Silence of Stolen Lives

By Rev. Nell Newton

Usually when a group is working on a project, there is friendly chatter as folks work and catch up on each other's lives. But this work was different. Our voices were hushed as we handled markers and t-shirts. We were being careful to spell the names, ages, and year of death correctly. Five or six of us worked steadily and had the last of the 200 t-shirts ready within an hour. I stayed quiet to complete the work without weeping.

Two days later, we walked quietly along Cherry Street, then pinned our 200 shirts onto a clothesline along with other church people. Soon, 2,700 t-shirts were gently waving in the wind – silent markers of lives stolen by gun violence.

A week later, the work was noisy, but, again, we were quiet. Seven of us pounded 200 rebar stakes into the rocky soil in front of the church. Clang! Clang! Clang! My arms and upper back complained as I lifted and dropped a heavy post driver onto the stakes over and over. But I didn't have much to say while I worked.



L to R: Marsha Meredith, Claudia Glass, & Mary Barad  
prepare t-shirts



John Faultersack hanging our t-shirts at the  
Alamodome

We hung the shirts on the posts the next morning, and we found ourselves talking more. It was as if the shirts cheered us onwards! When the work was done and all 200 shirts were fluttering in the breeze, we said a prayer, and shared a snack. We needed to turn towards one another, not in victory but in gratitude for the effort.

Like so many memorial projects, the whole is impressive, but the details are solemn. Seen from a distance, it might look like laundry or remind you of crucifixions. If you are able, it's worth strolling out to walk among the shirts. Remember, each shirt represents a life ended through gun violence. The white shirts represent suicides.

We'll be taking the memorial down in a couple of weeks, but the larger project will continue. The hope is the project can be repeated in every major city in Texas, and then all of the t-shirts can be displayed at the Capitol in Austin during the next legislative session.

In the meantime, I am grateful to this congregation for the courage to listen to this loud silence.



# Community Love Connections

By Pam Illar

The Rainbow Inclusion committee has been engaging in connecting our Church to the outer community. These experiences were attended to show support and uplift the LGBTQIA2S+ family village. This kinship was an opportunity to show an ever loving alliance with our Family. It truly does, “take a village”.

At this time in our society there are continued attacks on our demands that all people be free to be themselves and love whoever they wish. We must continue to uplift our families in support of all of our self-love and identities as human beings.

Connecting with the outer community gave First Unitarian Universalist the chance to show our unwavering cooperation and sincere care.

In mid-October UTSA north, UTSA downtown and Texas A&M San Antonio invited First UU to have an information table at each campus's celebration of National Coming Out Day. Students were offered an introduction to our church and free rainbow flags, lapel pins, friendship bracelets, stickers, and buttons from the closing Emerson Bookshop Plus.



L to R: Carol Collins, Rev. Mark Skrabacz, & Leslie Hinson manning the First UU table at UTSA's National Coming Out Day event.

Our personal ask as a Committee is that you join us in our monthly meetings to plan more activities like these. We need your loving support. We would love the opportunity to meet and greet you at our upcoming FUUnd lunch on December 10th following the service. Our soup and salad mixer will be a great opportunity to hear your ideas for the committee going forward.

We will be using these funds to support our initiatives like the Pride Festival and getting involved in community outreach next year.

May Love always win over hate. Loving connections make this possible. One Love

# CREF Awards \$8,500 to Three Local Non-Profits

By Bill Bush

On October 15, 2023, First Unitarian Universalists' Community Responsibility Endowment Fund (CREF) awarded \$8,500 to three area non-profit organizations. The 2023 recipients were: Free Battered Texas Women (FBTW), the Center for Refugee Service (CRS), and the American Indians of Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions (AIT-SCM). Representatives from each of these three worthy organizations participated in the Sunday service, in the process sharing their respective missions and values with the First UU congregation.

Free Battered Texas Women received \$1,800 for an exhibit entitled "Acting under Duress, Surviving with Resilience," of prose & photos about four formerly incarcerated sisters: Cathy Marston, Margie Crayton, Geraldine Swaim, and Gricelda Pozada. Its purpose is to humanize criminalized abuse survivors – serving all citizens in ending incarceration of female survivors. FBTW founder and director (and First UU member) Cathy Marston transcribed interviews with formerly incarcerated women and has completed three essays and some of the poster copy. The CREF grant will allow FBTW to complete the exhibit and display it at First UU, and to print a companion booklet that will be used at other local exhibitions of this important project.

The Center for Refugee Services received \$3,500 to provide essential supplies for their clients who are principally large families with young children, often with multiple children in diapers and girls/women of reproductive age. Since August 2021, CRS went from an agency serving 900 clients a year to serving over 5,000, mainly Afghan evacuees, all of whom live below the federal poverty level. CRS provides refugee children under 4 years of age with 25 diapers monthly, menstrual pads to women and girls of reproductive age, and free condoms. With multiple children per family needing diapers and pads, this program saves clients on their family's essential hygiene expenses. CRS has been informed that San Antonio will receive an additional 1,650 refugees between now and fall 2024, which will increase even more the number of clients needing diapers and menstrual pads. The CREF grant helps CRS provide these essential items to refugee families.

American Indians of Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions was awarded \$3,200 for a National Voters Registration Day event in September and the creation of a PSA video that highlights Native American presence still in San Antonio (see their [previous PSA video here](#)). This renewed video project furthers their work with peoples of all genders, races, orientations, and economic standing to fight for visibility, to demand justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Peoples (#MMIWP), to engage in democracy, and to respect Native peoples.

CREF got its start in 1982. Each year since then, CREF trustees solicit nominations from First Unitarian Universalist members. Once the nominations are received, the trustees send the nominees an application packet. In 2023, CREF received four nominations, and selected three nonprofit applicants to support, two of whom were first-time recipients of CREF grants.

For more information about the nomination process, as well as the nomination form, please visit the [CREF website](#).

Funds for the CREF grants come from the income, interest, and dividends earned from its endowment principal. CREF contributions are added to the principal each year during the October fundraising drive that church members generously support. The amount of interest and dividends earned during one year is the total amount of funds available for grants in the following year. Thank you to the members and friends of First UU.





\$1,800

For printing of exhibit  
informational booklets



AMERICAN INDIANS IN TEXAS AT THE SPANISH  
COLONIAL MISSIONS

\$3,200

For Video Project  
documenting and  
promoting voter  
registration.



\$3,500

To provide essential  
hygiene items to  
refugee families



# Trust Fund for Endowments

By Arlis Olson

Our thanks to the following people who made donations since the last newsletter.

August: Howard Berger – undesignated

September: Debra Loya, William Christ – birthday match; Heather Hedquist, Lucy Norton, John Holcomb, Martha Cooley, Brenda Cabaza, Tess Bobo, General Offering (\$403) – undesignated

October: Memoriam for Mary Anne Kramer

Total collected for the quarter: \$1,857

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.

Thanks to all who contributed. Don't forget birthday donations. We encourage donating a dollar for each year from the date of your birth. The other thing we ask is that you consider the church in your estate planning. See our Legacy Society article below.

## Legacy Society

By Arlis Olson

We have our first recognized members of the Legacy Society. Look for the names and acknowledgment in the lounge.

Can we count on you to join? ([trustfund@uusat.org](mailto:trustfund@uusat.org)) We are looking for people who have made a bequest to First Unitarian Church in their estate planning.

If you have included a bequest in your estate planning, regardless of the amount, we'd like to acknowledge that as a means of encouraging others to do so. There are several ways to do this. Probably the easiest is filling out a POD (Pay on Death) form for mutual funds. See your estate planning attorney or financial adviser to determine what is right for you.



# A Memorable Year for the UU Retired Women's Group

By Martha Cooley and Stanna Welch

How the year has flown since that January meeting of 2023 when the group had its first planning session! We were delighted when so many volunteered to be in charge of this year's programs. The following is a recap of the year:

**January:** The planning session included recognition of Marilyn Stavinocha for founding this group and for being its leader for two years. As a show of gratitude, the group made a donation of over \$700 for the Capital Campaign in Marilyn's honor.

**February:** Deanna Bowling's program asked each of us to share a turning point in our lives and tell how that affected us going forward. This was a wonderful time of learning more about each other.

**March:** Marianne Ross led a discussion on retirement and how it has affected our lives. Also at this meeting, we finalized plans for an April jewelry sale with proceeds from jewelry donated by the UU Retired Women to benefit the Capital Campaign.

**April:** The after-service jewelry sale was a huge success netting \$5,307. Jewelry later purchased at the September service auction brought the total past \$6,000. Costume jewelry not sold was taken to Dress for Success.

**May:** In a continuation of Marianne Ross's March presentation, we divided into groups and discussed questions pertaining to retirement and aging.

**June:** Bonnie Pope asked us as to share our favorite books and authors and why we love to read. Everyone left with at least one "new" book in our book exchange. Jessica Latimer invited the group to donate books to a recently opened bookstore in Brownsville. Fast forward...we did donate, and Jessica and her daughter Justine drove a carful of books to a very grateful community.

**July:** Donna Pereira and Terry Palin gave a detailed account of their daily agendas at this year's General Assembly. Arlis Olson brought "Vote Forward" packets for members who wanted to participate in the letter writing campaign for Ohio's August 8th special election.

**August:** Stanna Welch led the group as they broke into small groups to discuss "Moments of Inherent Excellence," an idea taken from the book *Landscapes of Aging and Spirituality*.

**September:** Arlis Olson presented an informative program focused on Olympia Brown, Tayhlor Coleman, and Jovita Idar, who gave of their time, energy, and talent to further voting rights for everyone. Arlis also passed out information concerning bills that recently passed or didn't pass in the Texas legislature.



Retired Women's Group presenting the proceeds from their jewelry sale to the Capital Campaign Committee. L to R: Sophia Vackimes, Arlis Olson, Jessica Latimer, Mary Grace Ketner, & Donna Pereira



October: Mary Potter invited her friend and former co-worker, local attorney Bill Fisher, who gave an illustrated talk on Spanish-language book publishing in San Antonio during the early 20th century.

November: Revered members Dr. Karen Waldron and Rev. Art Severance spoke about their books and writing experiences. Each had copies of their books for purchase, with a percentage of the proceeds going to the church's Capital Campaign. Thanks to Karen and Rev. Art, \$578 has been added to the Capital Campaign! Please contact Rev. Art if you're interested in purchasing books or cd's and Stanna if you'd like a copy of Karen's latest book, *A Woman's Journey: Not Done Yet*.

December: Wassail, holiday treats, and sharing favorite holiday stories or poems will help us all celebrate the holiday season.

What was not included in the above, but is part of every meeting, is the camaraderie we share with one another. Each member brings something special to the group, and we all benefit. If you've been thinking about joining the UU Retired Women's Group, we hope you'll make that a reality in 2024. Until then, on behalf of the group, we wish you the happiest of holidays!

## Going Out of Business

By Carol Collins

Emerson Bookshop Plus has started its going-out-of-business sale to make room for other church activities.

In 1998 Julio Noboa passed the lounge church bookshop to Carol Collins. When Sylvia Wheeler brought the book cart from a Dallas UU church years ago, there was space to expand. Marilyn Stavinoha provided the sanctuary classroom's first shelving unit for fair trade coffee and tea. Much has happened since then.

In December our bookshop will be open in the Sanctuary classroom after Sunday morning service. Except for new hymnals, everything is \$5 or less: First UU Side with Love shirts, UU lapel pins, fair trade coffees and teas, pagan and other car plaques, stickers, UU Pocket Guide, and books for children, and books on many topics like Emerson and Thoreau, daily inspiration, meditation, LGBTQ+ matters, earth-centered spirituality, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, humanism, philosophy, society, racism, earth care, Mary Oliver and other poets, physical and mental challenges, aging, and passing. Julio Noboa's book, *For the Americas: Encounters with Unitarian Universalist Values*, is also for sale. Charge and debit cards are accepted. Cash and checks are payable to First UU Church to save you time.



L to R: Elke Walten & Carol Collins. Elke & Carole have been stewards of the Emerson Bookshop Plus for over 25 years. Thank you, Carol & Elke, for your many years of service and devotion.

# A Good and Smart Method of Giving

By Rev. Mark Skrabacz

Starting at age 73, Individual Retirement Account (IRA) owners are required by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to take annual income withdrawals, known as Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs). Failure to take these withdrawals could subject IRA owners to stiff penalties. IRA owners may not want to take all of their RMDs because, for example, they have to pay taxes on the withdrawals or it may push them into a higher tax bracket.

Fortunately, if you are 70 ½ or older and wanting to make a financial contribution to First UU San Antonio in the form of a pledge, a Capital Campaign commitment or other gift, there's a planning method that can satisfy your RMD and reduce your 2023 taxes. It's called Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD).

The QCD allows you as a donor to instruct an IRA administrator to send up to \$100,000 per year—all or part of the annual RMD—to one or more qualifying charities and provides for a direct tax-exempt gift. The IRA assets go directly to charity, so donors don't report QCDs as taxable income and don't owe any taxes on the QCD, even if they do not itemize deductions.

Since this article will be published in our Inspire Magazine during our Winter Quarter in time for year-end charitable giving, I want to share with you how to make a QCD. I suggest that you contact your IRA administrator to see if they have a form that you can use to make a QCD request. If one is not available, then please consider writing a letter to your administrator following these steps:

- Enter the name and address of your IRA custodian/administrator.
- Enter the date of the letter.
- Enter your IRA account number.
- Enter the amount you wish to transfer to your church and the date by which you want the transfer completed.
- Enter the name and address of the church: First UU Church of San Antonio, 7150 W. Interstate 10, San Antonio, TX 78213.
- Briefly name the purpose of the gift, whether it is a Pledge for the Operating Account or for the Capital Campaign, or any other specific ministry or program of the church.
- Include a phone number or email address where you can be contacted.
- Sign the letter, print your name as the IRA Owner, and include your return mailing address.
- You may want to keep a copy of this letter for your records.

I'll be giving to our Church Community through this method this year and next and encourage you to do so, too.

P.S. This article is not intended to offer financial or tax advice. If you need those, please contact your tax advisor or other qualified professional.



# Pagan Happenings

By Sylvia Wheeler

Celestial Celebrations Circle (CCC) is the CUUPS - Covenant of Unitarian Universalist PaganS - group associated with First UU Church of San Antonio. We hold Rituals for all the - Sabbats - Pagan Holy Days. In months where there is no Ritual, we sponsor labyrinth walks at the church site which was laid out by Celestial Celebrations Circle. This Fall, we held two Rituals and one labyrinth walk.

Our first Ritual was Fall Equinox - or - Mabon. This is an astronomical occurrence which ancient peoples realized was a turning point in the natural cycle of the year - or - in Pagan terms, the Wheel of the Year. This Sabbat marks a shift in natural light - as in equi-nox or equal light for both night & day. For our Ritual this time, our Intention stated: Tonight, we walk the pentacle to restore balance, renew our relationship with earth and her cycles, as we prepare to face the coming darkness and celebrate the second harvest. Some explanations here include - pentacle - a five pointed star with each point labeled with an element from the universe and - second harvest - in terms of agricultural peoples, gathering in any remaining crops from the fields. We had 15 participants, including leaders, and planned the Ritual as 'short & sweet' so that we would be finished before the daylight was totally gone.

Our second Ritual was Samhain (pronounced sou-win), also known as Hallows. This is the Pagan New Year. It is the precursor to: Day of the Dead and All Hallows Eve, also known as Halloween. This Ritual was held in the Fellowship Hall at the church as it has become very well attended - this year with 50 participants, including families with children. As members of Celestial Celebrations Circle talked with participants, before and after the Ritual, we discovered that many of them heard about the Ritual from sources outside the church. For some, it was their first Pagan experience. Our main focus for this Sabbat is to visit with our beloved dead - those who have 'crossed thru the veil to the other side'. As Pagans, we perceive the 'veil between the worlds' as particularly porous at this time, which makes communicating with those on the other side much easier.



In November, we sponsored a labyrinth walk. There were 6 participants, including the leader. The weather cooperated nicely as the temperature was not too cool and the clouds came and went, allowing a good view of our Moon and Jupiter during the walk.

Our next event will be Winter Solstice, another astronomical occurrence, on Saturday, December 9 at 7:00 PM. We would love for you to join us!

# First UU Serves Up Dinner & Good Will at Haven for Hope

By John Dagger

During its September meeting the Social Justice Committee [SJC] decided to lead a “Community Volunteerism Initiative” as an effort to introduce potential sites for and benefits of volunteer activities. The goal is to organize at least one group volunteer activity per quarter.

On Saturday, November 4, ten UU’s participated in the 3:00 pm to 7:00 pm San Antonio Food Bank shift at Haven for Hope’s Community Kitchen. We cleaned, made sandwiches [hundreds] and served 433 meals to clients of Haven for Hope. It was a very busy shift. All were both fatigued and exhilarated by the experience and thanked heartily by the kitchen staff and the diners. One diner even treated the servers to a brief stand-up comedy set.

Volunteers met up afterwards at The Cove Restaurant for casual dining and fellowship. Thanks to all who participated! The SJC is looking at February for the next community outreach volunteer opportunity. Stay tuned!



L to R: Peter Myers, April Chase, John Dagger



L to R: Karen Conner, Mary Barad, Jessica Latimer



L to R: Tracey Homburg, Jessica Latimer, Judy Godinez,  
Marcella Santos, Margaret Neiheisel



# Thanksgiving at First UU

By Tracey Knouse

First UU Church held its annual Thanksgiving Luncheon on Thanksgiving Day where 100 members enjoyed turkey, along with lots of delicious side dishes and vegan options. The SWIM (Saturday Women's Inspirational Meeting) Chalice Circle chose this event as their church project for the year and assisted with both the set-up on Wednesday and clean up on Thanksgiving Day. Many thanks to all the members who contributed food and assisted with this festive meal. Special thanks to Kathy McFarlane, Congregational Administrator, and Mary Wright, Communications Manager, for their extra efforts and time to help facilitate the luncheon. SWIM member, Darcy Walker, was able to contact Dorothy Wallace in New Mexico, for valuable input on the set-up and luncheon tips for hosting. The church provided many decorations from past Fall celebrations and the SWIM group added to these to create table centerpieces for a pleasant meal for all.



## An Explanation About Our Order of Service (OOS)

By Rev. Mark Skrabacz

Over the years we've grown accustomed to printing more than a hundred Orders of Service every Sunday. This takes time and resources. Our Green Team has expressed concerns about the environmental impact of the use of paper and printer ink.

We understand that it's a nice feature for those who enter our Sanctuary Foyer to be greeted warmly and given a paper OOS. However, in the interest of ecology and economy, we have begun a month long transition to a new system that we expect to be completed by January.

Our plan is to prepare slides with large print to be projected on our big screen in the Sanctuary throughout the Service.

We will also be uploading the OOS to our church's website - [www.uusat.org](http://www.uusat.org). We will provide a QR Code in the Sanctuary Foyer on Sundays that will bring up the OOS on a smart phone or tablet.

We will continue to print a limited number of OOS, only 50, for those who need one due to their ability, eyesight, etc. and for our visitors and first time guests.

Thank you for your interest in this new development for our church, which is already standard procedure for many other UU churches.

As always, I and our Staff are available to listen to your concerns and suggestions for improving this process.

# Green Cemetery Tour

By Cheryl Lardy

On Saturday, October 21, the Green Sanctuary team and friends attended a tour of the Unbroken Circle Green Cemetery located in southern Bexar County. The Unbroken Circle is San Antonio's first and only Conservation Burial Ground. It honors wildlife preservation and management, the conservancy of all native grasses, plants, trees and other vegetation. Our team is especially interested in green burials because they are less wasteful of time, money, and natural resources.

It was a beautiful, sunny morning as we walked through the cemetery surrounded by 246 acres of conservation easement. Metha Haggard, the owner of the ranch where the cemetery and easement are located, shared her knowledge of the native plants, trees, and insects that live on her land. There is also a pet cemetery adjacent to the cemetery.

It wasn't hard to imagine what life might have been like on this ranch in "brush country" when the pace was slower and the only sounds you might hear for miles might be birdsong and a rattle or two. It's a peaceful place to visit and I took comfort in knowing the land will be preserved for many, many years to come.

We plan to host a short presentation about the Unbroken Circle Green Cemetery at our church in the near future. Please contact a Green Sanctuary team member if you are interested in attending. For more information about Unbroken Circle Cemetery: <https://unbrokencirclegreencemetery.com>.



Metha Haggard, ranch owner, and our First UU members



# Love and Remembrance Ceremony

By John Faultersack

“Love and Remembrance” is an annual community gathering most recently held in our Sanctuary on September 16th. The ceremony aims to bring people together to express compassion toward local families who have lost a loved one in police interactions. We honor the victims by saying their names, remembering their lives, and praying and singing together.

Blame or guilt is not the issue; those left behind are, and they deserve our support. The focus is to give love and support to the families involved in these heartbreaking circumstances. It is not to vilify all officers for the actions of a few. It was created to work together for healing and toward a better way forward for all of us.

A central figure in this effort has been Debby Jones-Bush, who, through funds raised at Love and Remembrance, started a foundation in memory of her nephew. (Marquis Jones was killed by police ten years ago, and feelings are still raw.) The foundation’s mission is to help support and heal the families of other victims. The Marquis Jones Foundation is now a registered charity. They are currently involved in behind-the-scenes support of those impacted by this violence. One of the group’s goals, which the event will continue to assist with, is to provide psychological and emotional support for those family members dealing with grief and anger. (A side note: Debby’s story is what initially got me involved in this church almost 7 years ago.)

First UU has been the site of four “Love and Remembrance” ceremonies over the past few years, and we look forward to hosting more. We have seen hope rising through Love and Remembrance. Join that hope. Our next ceremony will be in the summer of 2024.

# TXUUJM Year-End Celebration

By Mary Wright

The Texas UU Justice Ministry (TXUUJM) held their year-end celebration on November 29 via Zoom. TXUUJM is the UU State Action Network of Texas who educates and organizes Texas UUs, member congregations, and partners to advocate effectively for UU principles in public policy and the public square. The celebration featured a recap of TXUUJM’s activities over the past year, which have been vast with the legislature in session almost all year. They gave a brief list of activities to look for in the upcoming year and were blessed to have keynote speaker, Zr. Alex Kapitan, speak and answer questions.

Alex is a trainer, speaker, consultant, editor, and anti-oppression activist. A transgender and queer lifelong Unitarian Universalist, who grounds radical social justice work in a place of faith and love, and also does interfaith ministry to help queer and trans people connect to religion and spirituality. He worked for eight years at the national headquarters of the Unitarian Universalist Association, supporting anti-racism and Welcoming Congregation programming for congregations and managing large-scale social justice organizing efforts. He is part of the Transforming Hearts Collective and a co-author of the outstanding training series, Transgender Inclusion in Congregations.

To watch the video of the entire celebration, go to [TXUUJM 2023 Year-End Celebration - YouTube](#). Jump to m4nute 44:05 to hear Alex speak.

# Making San Antonio Safer

By Diane Duesterhoeft

On November 8 COPS/Metro held a Citywide Action at St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church. At least 17 folks from First UU were among the nearly 500 people from 61 institutions who participated. Mayor Ron Nirenberg, City Manager Erik Walsh, Police Chief William McManus, SAWS CEO Robert Puente, and CPS Energy CEO Rudy Garza responded to COPS/Metro leaders on issues of SA Ready to Work employment, safety and a Southeast side police station, and gun safety. This 5-minute video provides a summary - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcbA\\_2mu6c4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcbA_2mu6c4)



Photos from COPS/Metro's Citywide Action event on November 8

On Saturday, November 18 a press conference was held at St. Michael Catholic Church (418 Indiana Street, San Antonio, TX 78210) followed by a march to the Alamodome where marchers hung T-Shirts representing the 2,800 people in Bexar County who have lost their lives to gun violence during the past five years. This action was co-sponsored by COPS/Metro, Texas Impact, and Mission Presbyteryn. At least 14 First UU folks participated. Here is the video that led the 6pm newscast on KENS-TV that evening - <https://youtu.be/1iXJ6prxNHU?si=jzb3nko0FohrihLr>. On Sunday, November 19th, Councilman John Courage hosted a Gun Buyback program at the Alamodome Parking Lot B from noon to 5pm. Six hundred weapons were turned in.





Photos from the Peace March to the Alamodome and hanging the shirts



# FUUnd Lunches Return

By Mary Wright

After a several year hiatus due to COVID, FUUnd lunches returned to First UU. Held on the second Sundays of the month, FUUnd lunches are basically “potlucks with a purpose”. They are sponsored by official committees or groups of the church. Congregants are asked to each bring a dish to share, and donations are collected to benefit either the sponsoring group or an organization of their choosing. Visitors eat for free, and donations are always voluntary. It is a pay what you can system. In addition to raising funds, FUUnd lunches are a time for people to come together, get to know each other better, break bread and bond.

The Community Responsibility Endowment Fund (CREF) kicked off the lunches in August with a Mediterranean themed lunch. Proceeds from their lunch benefitted the CREF program. September’s lunch was sponsored by the Youth Religious Education (YRE) Committee and featured a two-part breakfast and brunch event. A take-and-go table was set up on the patio serving breakfast items before Worship Service and a full brunch spread was available after service. Proceeds from the YRE lunch went toward the Parent’s Night Out program. The Stewardship Committee sponsored their always very popular Chili Cook Off in October. Many pots of chili were submitted and prizes were given for the best Texas (no beans) chili, the best chili with beans, the best vegetarian/vegan chili, and the best all-around chili. Proceeds from the Chili Cook Off went towards the Stewardship program, who runs our annual pledge drive each Spring. Lastly, in November the Social Justice Committee hosted a Friendsgiving FUUnd Lunch. Featuring all the Thanksgiving classics, this was a great opportunity for friends who were going out of town or had plans on the holiday, to share in some of the Thanksgiving spirit together. Proceeds from the Friendsgiving FUUnd lunch benefitted Social Justice’s Outreach programs.

## Retired Women’s Book Drive

By Mary Wright

This past summer, First UU member, Jessica Latimer, was listening to Texas Public Radio when she heard the story of Gilbert Hernandez. Hernandez is a lifelong resident of Brownsville, TX who, like most young adults do, left Brownsville to go to college. While studying engineering in Massachusetts, Hernandez began rethinking what he wanted to do with his life. He took a sabbatical from college, returned to Brownsville, and began getting more involved in his community. He discovered that Brownsville, despite a population of over 180,000 people, had not a single bookstore in town. Poor literacy rates were one explanation. The Rio Grande Valley ranks dead last in literacy in the state of Texas. Low income was another. Willacy County, just north of Brownsville, ranks as the poorest county in Texas and Cameron County, where Brownsville is located, ranks third. But Hernandez didn’t listen to the excuses and in 2022 started setting up pop-up shops at community events selling donated and secondhand books. In January 2023 he opened a brick-and-mortar store in downtown Brownsville called Búho, Spanish for owl.

Jessica was so moved by Hernandez’ story she knew she wanted to do something to help. She approached the UU Retired Women’s Group, of which she is a member, with the idea of a book drive. The group took on the project and soon Jessica and her daughter, Justine Hansen, had a carload of books. They drove down to Brownsville in October to deliver the books in person to Hernandez, who was very grateful. The Women’s Group was able to collect and donate close to 300 books.

Many thanks to Jessica, Justine, and the Retired Women’s Group who continue to live out our UU values. To read more about Gilbert Hernandez and his bookstore, check out this article from the Texas Monthly magazine: [Brownsville’s New Independent Bookstore Is an Oasis in the Desert \(texasmonthly.com\)](https://www.texasmonthly.com/culture/brownsville-new-independent-bookstore/).



# UU the Vote 2024

By Dr. Jan Realini

Our congregation's UU the Vote effort for 2024 is already under way. Our volunteer work is part of the Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA) national nonpartisan UU the Vote program. This work is grounded in the Fifth UU principle: *We affirm and promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.* Democracy is important to us!

Our democracy has been stressed by laws that make voting more difficult and maps that are gerrymandered. This means that voting has become more important than ever. We the people can help strengthen our democracy, and there are lots of different things we can do.

The first thing, assuming you are eligible, is to be sure to register to vote—and then VOTE by Election Day. We have four elections coming up in 2024, so it will be a busy year:

- Tuesday March 5 is the Primary Election for state and federal races
- Saturday May 4 is the San Antonio and other Local Election
- Tuesday May 28 is the Primary Election Runoff date; and
- Tuesday November 5 is the state and federal (Presidential) election

Secondly, we can help register other people to vote by becoming a Volunteer Deputy Registrar (VDR). Our congregation has at least 13 VDRs, and they partner with other organizations, such as the League of Women Voters, to reach potential voters. There is even a program to register high school seniors, and several of our congregation's VDRs participate.

Thirdly, we can engage and educate voters. This includes family and friends, as well as knocking on doors and phone banking. We have worked with COPS/Metro on reaching out into our campus's Dellview neighborhood in the past, and we hope to have an enthusiastic turnout for this door-knocking and talking to voters in 2024. Another way to educate voters is by writing Letters to the Editor to submit to newspapers.

Next is big: getting out the vote, or GOTV. There are many methods to GOTV, including writing (e.g., Vote Forward) letters, which research has shown to improve turnout. Our letter-writing parties have allowed many at First UU to contribute. Similarly, postcards can be written and decorated at "parties" or by yourself at home. Phone- or text-banking can be done in Zoom meetings with training included. These methods can be used to help GOTV in other states and localities, as well as in San Antonio. Rides to the polls are important, too.

You can also help strengthen elections by becoming an Election Worker, that is an Election Judge or an Election Clerk. These are the people who, after they are trained, staff the polling places during an election. The Bexar County Elections Department needs more election workers, and they will offer trainings before the March election.

On March 17, there will be a UU the Vote worship service, and we hope to engage and inspire you to do whatever you can to help strengthen democracy in 2024.

Whew! That's a lot to do and a lot to choose from. Sincere thanks to all who have volunteered in our UU the Vote work. Our UU the Vote team welcomes YOU to participate in democracy.

# Planned Parenthood South Texas 2023 Annual Luncheon

by Tracey Homburg

Held on 9/12/23 at the Marriott Rivercenter Hotel, this long-awaited event (and its special guest speakers) did not disappoint! Over 1300 participants heard from Stacey Abrams, Wendy Davis, Mayor Ron Nirenberg, and SA's first lady, Erika Prosper. All of these Planned Parenthood advocates were passionate in their message and as motivational/inspirational as one could ever hope for.

Many allied partner organizations were involved (including several our congregation supports, like Empower House, Center for Refugee Services, League of Women Voters, Pride Center SA, etc.), hosting booths/tables with lots of information and tons of swag. Games contributed to a lively, festive atmosphere.

Our Social Justice Committee organized a group of 26 supporters, filling just over two and a half tables. In addition, several other First UU members attended the event at individually sponsored tables. So, in total, our congregants/friends/families donated more than \$10,000 to PPSTX. That's a lot of representation and support!

Three of our members were provided complimentary seats at the luncheon as thanks for hours they dedicated to a previous PP volunteer project. Those same individuals also purchased tickets and graciously donated these seats - shout out to Mary Barad, Pat Beck, and Pat Ellis! Thanks to their generosity, we were able to offer other First UU folks a chance to have their name drawn for a free seat. Via another drawing, participants won tickets for the VIP reception (see photos), and three donors - who were not able to attend - won books written and autographed by Ms. Abrams.

A video presentation of Stacey's talk/interview was shown in the Fellowship Hall on 10/1/23 for those who could not attend (or who simply wanted to hear her message again)!



Just some of the UU Members who attended the luncheon



# Grounds News

By Rev. Mark Skrabacz and Carol Collins

On November 14th the San Antonio Tree Surgeons very expertly removed the dead Monterey Oak tree from the playscape berm and installed a new Monterey Oak tree in a very good spot on the playground. It appears to be very well planted and has a nice shape. Its addition continues a line of trees around the playground that will shade the sidewalk and building.

The Tree Surgeons also completed their work on our large Red Oak in the courtyard. It was in danger of rubbing against another tree and over-shading it. Also, the branches were an at-risk issue for our safety. This trim will ensure safety as well as healthy growth.

Later in the month Cheryl Lardy and Carol Collins installed a spigot on the church's large rain barrel in front of the Fellowship Hall. The barrel's water can be used for the many nearby plants.

Kudos to Akos Szabo and Chris Gillis of the Grounds Committee, as well as other volunteers, for all they do to make our campus safer and more beautiful!





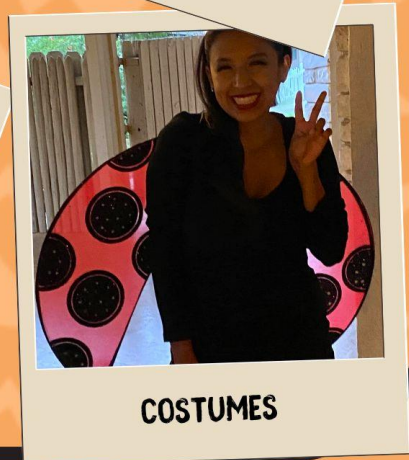
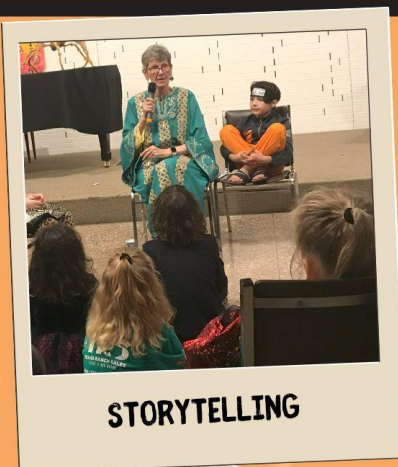
# Halloween Fun at First UU

By Mary Wright

The Social Activities Committee (headed up by Oscar Solis, Tina Solis, Cindy Daughtry, Dan Radcliffe, and myself) hosted our annual Halloween party. The party featured many games and activities for both kids and adults. Cindy and Dan ran a face painting booth, Oscar and Tina set up a goodie bag decorating table, and I ran the cake walk game. We had a brand new beanbag toss game, hand built and painted by Dan. Special guest tarot card reader, Stephanie Hickman, was busy all night giving out readings. The teens held their own “hang out” for the first half of the party, before joining everyone in the Fellowship Hall where the crowd was bewitched by scary stories told by our own Mary Grace Ketner. The night concluded with a rowdy costume contest where prizes were awarded for the funniest, scariest, and best overall costumes.

We had such a good time and can't wait until next year.

## Halloween Party 2023





# Capital Campaign Update

By Polly Noël

## Parking Lot Refresh

In early November we completed the second official Capital Campaign project – resurfacing and restriping our parking lot. You will remember that the first project was a refresh of our Sanctuary foyer, including custom made furniture, which occurred last April. The project started with some sweat equity when several First UU members spent several Saturdays prepping the lot by clearing away dirt, grass, and weeds. In November Mission Asphalt shut down our parking lot for a few days while they resurfaced the lot and repainted the parking stripes, directional arrows, and handicapped spots. The parking lot was officially opened by Rev. Mark Skrabacz and Polly Noël in a ribbon cutting ceremony after service on November 12<sup>th</sup>.



Rev. Mark and Polly Noël cutting the ribbon to officially open our new parking lot.

## Design Update: New Rendering of Lounge on View in Fellowship Hall

Next time you're in Fellowship Hall, take a look at the bulletin board to see an exciting update of the campus design from our architectural firm, Derrick Architects. Most important is a new rendering of the Lounge. Thanks to a generous gift from Derrick Architects, valued at \$2000, the rendering shows the latest version of the updated Lounge to be paid for with your Capital Campaign Funds.



Highlights of the new Lounge include lots of natural light from glass windows and doors, varied seating options for a café feel with outlets on the bar and countertops for laptops, phones and crockpots, and an enlarged space that allows for better and faster options for serving buffet meals. The improved natural light is a result of a wall of windows similar to the walls of the Sanctuary Foyer that brings the outdoors inside. There are garden storefront windows on the end wall, additional windows on the patio wall, new glass doors, and upper clerestory windows that match those in Fellowship Hall. The windows look out onto the patio, into the meditation garden, and onto a new entrance area from the parking lot. In addition, the new Lounge design delivers an enlarged Kitchen and Lounge with one accessible restroom by capturing the existing hall space.

The gray color in the rendering was used because it shows details better, but the new Lounge will be different colors, not yet chosen. There are also two new drawings showing a much-improved North Entry from the parking lot to the patio using the sidewalk between Fellowship Hall and Office Building #3.

### **Financial Update: Fundraising Efforts Continue**

Currently the Capital Campaign Fund has about \$300,000 in unallocated funds. Funds have been spent or allocated for resurfacing and striping the parking lot, improved Wi-Fi, new security fencing, and playground improvements. Fundraising efforts are still underway to fund the Kitchen/Lounge renovation previously estimated to cost about \$1 million. We will have a firmer cost estimate next month when Derrick Architects completes its schematic design. They are looking at attractive but more affordable options as shown in the new rendering.

Campaign commitments are arriving at the rate of about \$21,000 per month. We appreciate all who are making regular payments toward their Capital Campaign commitments and encourage those who can, to accelerate their donations in early 2024. We also encourage those who have not yet made a commitment to do so. Both efforts will help us renovate the Kitchen/Lounge sooner.

To make a Capital Campaign commitment or increase your commitment, contact [office@uusat.org](mailto:office@uusat.org). To discuss your commitment, contact Polly Noel or Carolyn Skrabacz.





# Winter Solstice Meditation

By Lyn Cox from the UUA Worship Web

We pause as the path of the sun reverses, seemingly holding its place for a moment of turning. Let us delve into the gifts of darkness at the winter solstice. We follow curiosity and contemplation down into the cold earth, taking a journey to the world below the surface. Here we find acorns, cached by squirrels and chipmunks, perhaps to be food laid in store, or perhaps to become trees in the fullness of time. We find the burrows of hibernating animals, those who sleep and repair. We find seeds, including some that will not sprout unless they first wait through frost and ice. Life finds rest and renewal in the darkness.

May those who are weary find comfort. May those who are struggling find meaning and companionship. May those who are injured or ill find recovery. May those who hunger find abundance. Let this be a time of healing. And may the dreams of the dark lead us to share these gifts with one another.

Our imagination rises back to the surface, to life where the cold ground meets the crisp air. Here we observe life finding its way. We observe animals eating seeds left on the ground, though the harvest is long past. We notice the migration of birds, natural movement that allows populations to find places where they can thrive. We observe the trees that appear to sleep, and yet hold sap that will rise again before the spring arrives. We observe that not everything lives through the winter, and yet all that has lived returns to the earth and is transformed.

Let this be a time of resilience. May the changing seasons bring new meaning and new insights. May creativity and persistence lead us to find resources for all to share. May those who migrate find safety, and may there be good news in the wind. May transformation lead us onward.

We now lift our imagination to the sky, to the returning sun and to the brilliant winter night. Shifting hours of light and darkness remind us that change is part of the rhythm of the universe, and so trouble does not last. Acknowledging the gifts of darkness, we also look forward to the growing light, a change that brings glimmers of hope. We marvel at the beauty of this time: stars unobstructed by leaves, jewels of the night shining over the land, moon and meteors inspiring us to awe and wonder.

Let this be a time of celebration. What joy can be found, let us hold it close, blow on its embers, and share its spark. We do not take for granted having come this far, and we give thanks for our companions on the journey. We continue our meditation in silence.

## Music Lessons with Dana Clark

I have taught private music lessons for 36 years, and have also taught music classes at Circle School, Winston School, and Center for Refugee Services. I currently teach piano, guitar, ukulele, music theory, and flute. Adults and children welcome! Lessons are tailored to each student's learning style and goals.

I am located just south of downtown near the Fair Ave exit of 281 & the New Braunfels Ave exit of I10. Lessons are \$20 for a half hour and \$40 for an hour. My website is [www.DanaClarkMusic.com](http://www.DanaClarkMusic.com)  
Email me at [DanaPiano1@gmail.com](mailto:DanaPiano1@gmail.com)



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