



# FIRST UU NEWS

*We gather in community to nourish souls, transform lives, and do justice.*

## Rekindled

by Rev. Meg Barnhouse



I was at the Keith Urban concert thinking about Albert Schweitzer, who wrote: “At times, our own light goes out, and is rekindled by a spark from another person.”

A Jewish man named Harry had mailed me tickets to the concert, and I had promised him I would go. I had met him a few weeks ago in a small southern town at a coffee shop where I was performing. Carrying guitars and other gear out of the winter darkness into its red and gold holiday light, I paused to be introduced to a man wearing a dark suit and a yarmulke. The two gay men who own the place said Harry was my kind of person, that he’d read my books and liked my music and that we should know one another.

He’d just been to a funeral, he said, and he wished he could stay for my singing, but he’d promised his wife he’d be home pretty soon. He ended up staying anyway, for the first set.

During the break he came up to me and put a folded hundred-dollar bill into my hand. I was doing a good thing with my music, he said,

and he wanted to help support it. And, by the way, did I like Keith Urban?

Yes, I answered, I guess. That “take your cat and leave my sweater” song was catchy and clever.

He had tickets to a Keith Urban concert. Would I like to go? Harry was on the board of the local bank, and he and his wife had to go to the annual holiday dinner the night of the concert. He made me promise that if he sent the tickets I would go.

A promise is a promise, so even though on the evening of the event I felt too busy, too tired, too pressed to go, a friend and I got our cowgirl boots on and went. The arena was packed, and the lights looked beautiful piercing the smoke from the smoke machines. (At the concerts I remember from my college years they didn’t need machines to make the smoke. That’s all I’m saying about that.)

Listening to the blisteringly loud music pound through the wadded-up tissue paper I’d stuffed into my ears, I could almost feel new neuro-pathways being created in my

brain. Ideas began piercing the fog of busyness in my brain. Light came from places I hadn’t felt it come from in a while. Harry’s generosity had rekindled my spark.

As I write this, Hanukkah is on its way. We’ll be celebrating the miracle where one tiny vial of sacred oil burned for eight days. The Jews had driven Antiochus’ soldiers out of Jerusalem, and the temple had been cleansed of the desecration, the big lie, the idols that had been erected in the holy of holies. The desecration of the temple was supposed to wipe out the Jews’ spirit and their culture, but instead it made them angry enough to revolt. The temple had to be consecrated, but most of the holy oil had been polluted by the Syrian soldiers. The one vial of oil lit the lamps for long enough for more sacred oil to be made.

Historically, I don’t really care whether the oil really verifiably burned for eight days. I absorb faith stories the same way I think and feel about dreams. If the story of Hanukkah were my dream, it would

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**PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

# The Season of Advent

by **Angela Smith**



When it comes to the holiday trappings of this multi-flavored season—Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Winter Solstice, Boxing Day, Twelfth Night, you name it!—call me the Jingle Bell kid. I love the lights, trees, decorations, music, food, corny movies, and tacky sweaters. I'm all for the sensory indulgences associated with this time of year, both sacred and secular. The only thing that would make the season more perfect for me would be a gingerbread-flavored Cheeto.

My love for the season and its sundry delights goes back to childhood. In a Christmas pageant of my early years, I was given the role of an angel—probably because of my name. But I wasn't content to just stand there and shout out my one line, "Peace on earth, good will to men!" Instead I danced around the stage, wildly flapping my wings and throwing kisses to the shepherds and wise men. I couldn't help myself; I was simply acting out the giddy exuberance I felt for this magical season.

When I was a child, time seemed to move ever so slowly in the days before Christmas, and Christmas Eve, in my young mind, was the longest day of the year. I would sit and stare at the presents under the tree, like someone waiting for a pot of water to boil, frustrated they were beyond my reach until the calendar

hit Dec. 25. Now that I'm older, time moves more swiftly, and just as the decorations go down from one Christmas, before you know it, the time has come to put them up again.

Like many of my fellow UUs, I come from a traditional Christian background, and I've always respected the liberal Christian theology that underlies our Unitarian Universalist faith. Those of you who came up in the more "catholic" versions of Christianity are familiar with the liturgical seasons. Of all those seasons, Advent for me was the most appealing. Even though that season of hope and promise was confined to the four Sundays and weekdays leading to Christmas, this was actually a season I could live with all year.

Here at First UU Austin, I believe we've come into in an extended season of Advent. Certainly, with so much to look forward to, we're in a time of expectation, hope and promise. We'll soon start on our building renovation program. Last month we held a series of focus group meetings to discuss whether we will become a permanent sanctuary church. Next year we'll begin revisiting our mission statement. All these focus on the hopes and expectations of this congregation.

One way we reflect the promise of the future is through our budget,

which we'll vote on at our congregational meeting on Dec. 13 this month. We hope you'll be there to cast your vote the support the important and crucial work of this church and to affirm the efforts of our outstanding ministerial team and staff. You've already demonstrated that support through your generous pledges made during our recent stewardship campaign. Thank you for your gifts; whatever the amount, each one makes a difference.

In the words of the German Jesuit Alfred Delp: "Advent is the time of promise; it is not yet the time of fulfillment...Space is still filled with the noise of destruction and annihilation, the shouts of self-assurance and arrogance, the weeping of despair and helplessness. But 'round about the horizon the eternal realities stand silent in their age-old longing. There shines on them already the first mild light of the radiant fulfillment to come. From afar sound the first notes as of pipes and voices, not yet discernible as a song or melody. It is all far off still, and only just announced and foretold. But it is happening, today."

Yes, it is happening today at First UU Austin, and I'm happy and grateful to be part of it. I wish for all of you the love, peace and joy of this season and all seasons yet to come. ■

*“Rekindled” continued*

be about being under menacing pressure to give up our truth. It would be saying there was a desecration, a lie, set up in our Holy of Holies.

Our congregation has been in a tight money situation. Our oil is running low. It’s easy to feel frustrated, squeezed, scared, in need of a miracle. It’s easy for one’s little light to flicker, wondering if there is enough energy to make it last as long as it needs to last. Dr. Wayne Bockman’s challenge is a spark in the darkness. He will write a check for \$5,000 in January to help the church start on a very stripped down, but even footing if others will pledge to also write checks in January totaling another \$50,000. That church members have already stepped up to get halfway to

the goal is pouring more energy into our “lamps.” When the staff sees the congregation willing to give more, it makes their giving up their UUA-mandated and board-recommended pay increases easier to bear.

What is the lie in the center of this? I think it is that some of us are wondering whether our money situation would be better if we were not a leader in our denomination’s support of immigration reform and immigrants’ rights. Would more people feel comfortable if we were not joining with the new, young civil rights movement, Black Lives Matter? There is little way to know. We follow the guidance of our mission statement to the best of our ability. The thought to take it easy, to remain

comfortable, is a desecration of our faith and its history. Some of our Unitarian forbears did choose to be respectable rather than just in matters of women’s suffrage, abolitionism, and other historical movements, but these are not the Unitarians whose names we speak with pride.

The contributions of First UU’s members, contributions of time, of skill, of money, are the fuel upon which it depends. May we be filled with courage and with hope this season. Let our light shine, and may it shine to proclaim that we have driven out the tyrants of fear and timidity. May it shine to illumine the next steps we must take to be the church we are called by our best selves to be. ■



*For more info on the special performance of “Magnificat,” see page 14.*

## **Drive a Senior Benefit Concert**

**See page 9 for details**

The First UU Intergenerational Choir keep up the holiday tradition of joining other church choirs from the north and central Austin area to ring in the holidays. A free-will offering will support the works of Drive a Senior, which offers travel support to seniors. ■

## Music Matters

**by Brent Baldwin, music director**

The First Unitarian Universalist Church Adult Choir and Orchestra present:

# Magnificat

by J.S. Bach

Featuring special guests  
from the Austin Symphony  
and Conspirare

*December 6, 2015*  
(both morning services)

## LIFESPAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

# Lifespan RE highlights

by Rev. Marisol Caballero, Assistant Minister



## Be a 2015 Surprise Pal!

Consider becoming a Surprise Pal this year! Surprise Pals is an annual project that provides opportunities for the development of intergenerational connections. Here's how it works: interested adult church members submit to a background

check and are paired with a child in our congregation to exchange letters and small, meaningful gifts over the course of several weeks. The adult "surprise pal" and the parents of the child are aware of the pairing, but the identity of their "surprise pal" is not revealed to the kid until a party that ends the project and allows for face-to-face conversation and laughs! This project introduces the children of our congregation to trusted adults within their church community whom they might not otherwise meet.

Registration begins Dec. 6. The project will run from Jan. 10–Feb. 21 this year. Participants must commit to attend the reveal party on Feb. 21. To participate, contact [laine.young@austinuu.org](mailto:laine.young@austinuu.org) or pick up a registration form on the Lifespan RE table in the gallery.

## Guest at Your Table Boxes are Back!

Each year, our congregation participates in the UU Service Committee's fundraiser known as "Guest at Your Table." The UUSC is the Unitarian Universalist Association's international and domestic arm for human rights work. The idea of this campaign is each family in the church gets a small "piggy bank" to set at their table. You donate the approximate cost of a meal (or more!) for a guest to eat with your family each time you sit down to eat. Return the box to the church on Dec. 13 and we will send our collective contribution to the UUSC to

assist in their great work! This program is a wonderful way to teach children about generosity and gratitude, and a great way for adults to be reminded of such lessons, too. The boxes are now available at the Lifespan RE table in the gallery. Stop by and get yours today!

## F.R.E.D. Night Happenings:

No reservation required to the hottest Wednesday night spot in town! All are welcome to join us for an always-delicious dinner at 6 p.m. (\$6/person, kids under 12 eat free), followed by mind-blowing classes and workshops! (Church closed on Wed. Dec. 23 for Christmas holiday.) This semester we're offering the following:

**"Living the Welcoming Congregation: Continuing the Welcoming Congregation Journey," 7–9 p.m. Alternating Wednesdays (Dec. 2 & 16) \$15 registration fee (scholarships available)**

This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of First UU being recognized by the UUA as having completed the necessary steps to become an official "Welcoming Congregation" to LGBTQ-identifying people of good will! To honor this wonderful milestone and renew this commitment, we're participating in the refresher course, "Living the Welcoming Congregation," toward obtaining our certificate confirming we're committed to the ongoing journey of acceptance. A lot has happened in the LGBTQ movement in the past 20 years! Please join in this joyous struggle, meet other allies and queer members, and help First UU reach this goal.

**"Resistance and Transformation: Unitarian Universalist Social Justice History," 7–9 p.m. Alternating Wednesdays (Dec. 9) \$15 registration fee (scholarships available)**

*continued on next page*

Grounded in the belief that even “failures” in our history can be instructive, this program presents the ongoing struggle of our tradition to live up to its ever-evolving ideals of social transformation. Themes include abolition, peace-making, civil rights, free speech, utopianism, counter-culture, the women’s movements of both 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and more.

### **First Sunday Seminars, Dec. 6**

First Sunday Seminars take place on the first Sunday each month. This multi-track, adult religious education experience has options in areas such as leadership development, spiritual practices, UU identity development, and spiritual practices. No prior registration required. A simple lunch will be available in Howson Hall from noon–1 p.m. for \$5 (available to go for Forum attendees), and childcare will be provided. Please check each monthly newsletter for detailed information on First Sunday Seminars!

### **Faith Formation Track: “Understanding Advance Directives” with Stephanie Ericson, an Internal Medicine Physician, and Steve Parker, Director of Access and Marketing of Hospice Austin**

When asked, most people say it’s important to put their wishes in writing, but a minority actually do this. Many people aren’t sure where to begin, and this is a topic that is often neglected, even at our annual wellness clinic visits. Join us for a session on how to talk with family and health care providers about what would be important to you at the end of life. This program is designed to inspire open conversation about personal goals, values, and end-of-life preferences.

### **Spiritual Practice Track: “The Passion Test: The Effortless Path to Discovering Your Life Purpose,” with Peter Langlois**

Your passions are those things that give your life joy and meaning. The Passion Test is a simple, structured, fun way to become clearer on how to start living a more passionate life today. It is particularly helpful for people who feel dissatisfied with how their life is currently, who are undergoing a transition (like retirement), or who have so many passions that they find it difficult to focus on those that are most important.

### **Science and Religion Seminar Series with Bruce Naylor, every 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, 1–2:30 p.m.**

Science and religion are considered the two great schemas for understanding existence. We will be exploring how science provides a “naturalistic” understanding of the universe, and how religion can be recast from the naturalistic perspective. We will begin with the social brain, exploring how being a social animal shaped the evolution of our brains, and how religion evolved as part of this process.

### **Annual Christmas Pageant, Dec. 13**

Don your best bathrobe and come to church ready to take the journey to Bethlehem, at 9:15 and 10:45 Sunday services. For those who have never experienced a First UU Christmas Pageant before, you are in for a real treat with this most treasured tradition! All (especially children) are encouraged to participate with no prior rehearsal. Costumes will be laid out in the lobby to choose from, and our narrator will invite all of our nativity characters up on cue! In this half-scripted, half-improvised, but always sincere pageant, the whole congregation comes to imagine the story of Christmas. This is a worship service not to miss!

### **Third Annual Christmas Potluck Feast! Dec. 13, Howson Hall, noon-1 p.m.**

Celebrate the season with a holiday feast after the second service Christmas Pageant in Howson Hall! Please bring a large portion of sides, desserts, salads, or a vegetarian main dish option to share.

### **People Of Color Brunch, Dec. 20**

We host informative discussion, exciting field trips, and perceptive social support for people who identify as POCs (person of color, Latina/o, bicultural, or multicultural).

### **Dec. 20: Brunch at Hoover’s Cooking, 12–2 p.m.**

We will meet in the gallery and then caravan from the church to Hoover’s Cooking (2002 Manor Rd) for Texas soul food and great company!

## New Member Recognition

**Sunday, January 24**  
Sanctuary, during  
worship services

Signed the membership book this year, but still haven't participated in a New Member Recognition ceremony yet? Be introduced to and received by the congregation!

Participation is simple and optional. You'll be asked to join Rev. Meg at the front of the church, briefly introduce yourselves to the congregation, and a short litany will be read. (Bring a copy of the bulletin up with you so you can read the litany.)

If you'd like to participate, just show up! Wear your "new member" ribbon (extras may be found at the visitor/membership table).

## Getting to Know UU Class

**Sunday, Dec. 6**  
Room 15  
12:15–1:15 p.m.

This class is a basic introduction to UU history, as well as a history of First UU Austin. You will also have opportunities to ask questions and share faith histories with other attendees. Childcare is provided. Contact: Shannon Posern, [membership@austinuu.org](mailto:membership@austinuu.org).

*Lifespan RE news continued*

## Third Annual Christmas Cookie & Ornament Decorating Party!

**Howson Hall, 4-5 p.m.**

Join us before the 5 p.m. Christmas Eve service to sing along with Christmas carols and sip hot cocoa, tea, and coffee while decorating cookies and ornaments!

## OWL Facilitator Training Jan 8–10 K–1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> grade

Live Oak UU Church in Cedar Park will host a training to become a certified Our Whole Lives facilitator in the above grades. Our Whole Lives is an award-winning comprehensive sex education curriculum. "Grounded in a holistic view of sexuality, Our Whole Lives provides accurate, age appropriate factual information while also helping participants clarify their values, build interpersonal skills, and understand the spiritual,

emotional, and social aspects of sexuality." \$250 registration. Contact Laine for more info: [laine.young@austinuu.org](mailto:laine.young@austinuu.org).

## Our Whole Lives (OWL) 7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade

We will be proudly offering OWL (Our Whole Lives), a comprehensive and progressive sex education curriculum, to junior high and high schoolers this semester. The classes will meet on Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m., beginning Jan. 13 and continuing through May, including 2–3 lock-ins (TBA). More information on registration and classes are available by emailing [laine.young@austinuu.org](mailto:laine.young@austinuu.org) and by attending the mandatory parent orientation on Jan. 6, 7 p.m. Registration forms are on the RE table in the gallery. Registration fee is \$40, which will cover the cost of food for the lock-ins. Scholarships available. ■

## DENOMINATIONAL CONNECTIONS

### Heart of Texas Cluster Leadership Series, Dec. 5

A one-day workshop on topics from Dwight Brown Leadership Experience. "Systems Theory & Faith Development" will be presented by Natalie Briscoe, Southern Region Congregational Life staff, and hosted by the Comal County UU Society, New Braunfels, from 10 a.m.–3 p.m. Includes lunch. Link to registration at <http://bit.ly/HoTLS>, Early registration ends Nov. 30.

### Save the Date!

**Feb. 6:** One-day workshop, 10 a.m.–3 p.m. on topics from Dwight Brown Leadership Experience. Includes lunch. Hosted by First UU of San Antonio. Topics include governance, power and authority, growth, change, church size theory."

### Carpool Opportunities

Looking to carpool to a UU event outside Austin? Email Margaret Borden at [denom@austinuu.org](mailto:denom@austinuu.org) and she'll attempt to pair you with someone to share the ride.



## UBarU Certified as IDA Dark-Sky Park

UBarU, the Unitarian Universalist Camp and Retreat Center in the rugged Texas Hill Country, has become the most recent Dark-Sky Park certified by the International Dark-Sky Association. The IDA mission is to recognize and promote excellent stewardship of the night sky. Light pollution and over-lighting disrupts the flight patterns of migrating birds, harms the habitats of nocturnal animals, wastes energy and diminishes the appreciation of the majesty of the universe in which we live. The IDA achieves its mission by creating guidelines for responsible lighting and certifying products that meet these guidelines, developing educational materials, conducting workshops and seminars, and evaluating to what degree communities and other controlled lands meet the IDA-lighting guidelines and standards through their International Dark-Sky Places program.

UBarU's mission of providing a "welcoming, peaceful place to gather for spiritual, educational, and recreational purposes in harmony with our Unitarian Universalist principles and the land," along with its remote location two hours west of Austin, made it an ideal candidate to pursue Dark-Sky Park certification.

Notably, this is the very first IDA Dark-Sky Park on unrestricted privately-owned land, and one of the first involving any form of privately-owned land even with restrictions. It is the 22<sup>nd</sup> IDA Dark-Sky Park in the U.S. and the 29<sup>th</sup> such park in the world. In fact, UBarU worked with the IDA to determine the details for establishing Dark-Sky Parks on unrestricted privately owned lands; to date, all other U.S. Dark-Sky Parks are located on state-owned or nationally-owned lands.

UBarU has hosted a number of astronomy-based events, including a recent astronomy weekend to view the Perseids meteor shower last summer. Just as UBarU has served as a model for the IDA for establishing Dark-Sky Parks on privately-owned lands, it is intended that it will also serve as a model and play a leadership role for other camp and retreat centers in practicing good stewardship for the planet as a whole. Be sure to plan some night-sky watching for your next visit to UBarU.

For more information, check the following weblinks: UBarU website, [www.ubaru.org](http://www.ubaru.org); IDA website, [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org); UBarU on Facebook, [www.facebook.com/UBarURetreat](http://www.facebook.com/UBarURetreat).

## Green Tip: Wastewater Averaging Begins

Many folks are not aware that their wastewater or sewer bill is averaged over three months in the winter when outside watering is at a minimum. Irrigation during the winter months is not necessary because the plants are dormant and are not growing. From November

to the end of February, the lowest three months of water use are averaged and that amount will be your wastewater cost for the next twelve months. So remember, every drop you save through February will save you all next year! *From your friends at Green Sanctuary.* ■

### "Path to Membership" class

**Saturday, January 9  
9 a.m.–12 p.m.  
Howson Hall**

Breakfast and childcare are provided for this quarterly class designed for those interested in becoming members. Learn about the responsibilities of membership from Rev. Barnhouse; learn about UU history and the history of this church; share faith stories with other prospective members (optional); hear about ways to connect in the church; and sign the membership book and fill out new member paperwork, if you feel ready!

Please RSVP to [membership@austinuu.org](mailto:membership@austinuu.org) as soon as possible or with Shannon at the visitor table, so we can get an accurate head count for food and childcare.

### Yew Grove Dark Moon Ritual

**Tuesday, Dec. 11  
7 p.m.**

We'll meet under the oaks in front of the church, or inside if it's too cold. Bring a snack. We'll talk about Yule, the time of darkness on the earth, and our response to seasonal changes. Please note the date! December will not have a full moon. More info: [yewgrove@austinuu.org](mailto:yewgrove@austinuu.org).

PEOPLE'S COMMUNITY CLINIC

Austin Presence Group

December 3 & 17
Room 13B
6:30-8 p.m.

Each month we will discuss a chapter from "The Power of Now." Then we may tune in to an Eckhart Tolle video. A \$5 donation is requested in order to support the church. Visit us at www.meetup.com/AustinPresence.

Come light another candle to illuminate your understanding along the spiritual path called life. Contact: Joe Linsalata, (512) 327-5000 or linsalata@austin.rr.com.

Save the Date!

Congregational meeting

Sunday, December 13, Sanctuary
1:15-2:30 p.m.

A Cheer For a Job Well Done!

Give me a T... for the many Thanks for the 832 books you gave.
Give me an H... for the Happy child who got a book on clinic day.
Give me an A... for our Austin UU kids who gave their books to share.
Give me an N... for this Nonprofit that's thankful that you care.
Give me a K... for the Kindness and social values that we teach.
Give me an S... for Showing these are values lived, not just preached.

You did it! You exceeded the number of books collected for People's Community Clinic last year. How wonderful you are! Our thanks to all.

We collected a large number of books this year, including one especially generous donation of 520 books. We are not sure you know this, but somewhere amongst our church family is an angel! Yep, there are nine known angels in the angel world: seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, virtues, powers, principalities, archangels, and guardian angels. But, now we have a tenth...a Unitarian children's book angel! Should that angel breeze past you or whisper in

your ear their name, do let us know we are so grateful and want to personally shake their wing! Thank you, angel.

During the year, if you are "book cleaning" and find you have children's books to donate to PCC, you can drop them off at the Social Action table in the gallery any Sunday.

The PCC Collating Group will meet on Monday, Dec. 7 at 9:30 a.m. in the clinic's second floor conference room. The clinic is located at 2909 N. IH35. If you would like more information about First UU's volunteer activities with PCC, please email pcc@austinuu.org.

Join us for some enchanting fun!

Sunday, January 10
Rm. 15, 5 p.m.

The CHARM Committee is seeking new leadership and new energy for CampUU/Hogwarts, a beloved First UU summer tradition! We invite you to join our party as a fun brainstorming and planning opportunity.

While our primary focus for this party is the grown-ups, we will offer Hogwarts-

related activities for folks with school-aged kids in a separate room, and childcare for younger children. We hope you will join us for some magically-inspired food, games, crafts, and fellowship as we imagine the future of this beloved camp.

Please RSVP on the church website under Religious Education, CampUU/Hogwarts. Questions? Contact Vicki Almstrum at campuu@austinuu.org.

## FIRST UU SOCIAL ACTION EVENTS December 2015

### Green Sanctuary Re-Gifting Event

**Saturday, Dec. 6**  
**Howson Hall**

This second annual event will be held between first and second service, and will continue until the items are gone.

Bring yesteryear's gifts or extra stuff from around the house that you no longer use/need: dishes, vases, clocks, ornaments, wall hangings and photos, or other typical holiday gift items. No clothing please. Bring everything on Sun. Nov. 29, as the event will be the following Sunday. If you have nothing to bring, just check out the tables and see if there's something you can use!

### Vote for 2016 Monthly Special Offerings

**Sunday, December 13**

This is your chance to have a say in which social justice nonprofits receive part of our 2016 monthly special offerings! Church members will have one day to vote for their top ten among the worthy nonprofits that have been nominated this year. Voting will be in person only and will take place after both worship services at the Social Action table in the gallery as well

as before and after the congregational meeting that afternoon.

For more information, contact Social Action Chair Wendy Erisman at [socialaction@austinuu.org](mailto:socialaction@austinuu.org).

### Drive A Senior Christmas Choral Event

**Friday, Dec. 4, 7:30 p.m.**  
**St. Louis Catholic Church**  
**7601 Burnet Rd.**

Enjoy a memorable evening of beautiful Christmas music as ten choirs and bell groups from our sponsoring congregations perform holiday classics, including First UU's own Intergenerational Choir.

Admission is free but we'll take special offerings to help toward providing transportation services to our older neighbors. We're also seeking business and individual sponsorships to this event, our largest fundraiser of the year. All donations are tax deductible.

### "Standing on the Side of Love" t-shirts are here!

Adult and youth sizes, \$10 each. Available at the Social Action table in the gallery after Sunday services. Or contact Wendy Erisman at [socialaction@austinuu.org](mailto:socialaction@austinuu.org).

### Alphabet Soup Social Club

**First Sunday of the  
month, 12 p.m.**

This group is for anyone who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersexual, pansexual, or asexual. The goal is to provide a safe and nurturing environment for us to gather in community and nourish our souls. If you're a heterosexual ally we welcome your support but ask you refrain from attending these meetings.

We meet on the first Sunday for brunch after second service at a rotating location. Check the weekly bulletin for location details each month. We also meet for ad hoc events throughout the month. For more info contact Tomas Medina at [alphabetsoup@austinuu.org](mailto:alphabetsoup@austinuu.org), or follow us on Facebook.

### Senior Luncheon

**Wednesday, Dec. 9**  
**Howson Hall**  
**12 p.m.**

Our program will be music by the New Austin Polka Band, with our own Dan Wilson. They are always great fun. Soup, salad and dessert will be served for \$5. Please RSVP to Alice Cashman: (512) 837-0988.

## HEALTHY RELATIONS MINISTRY

# Advice from Covenant Corner

Dear Covenant,

At a church luncheon, people mostly bussed their own dishes when they finished eating. However, some people finished after the program began and others left items on the table. One of the attendees began clearing the tables after our program began, a musical performance. I found both the movement and the noise extremely distracting. I looked around, and saw others glancing at the person's activity, too.

After the program was over, I spoke to the person, expressing how distracting I found her actions. Her response was, "I was trying to help and tried to work as quietly as possible." She did not seem to understand my concern, and did not indicate she saw any problem with her behavior.

I want to go to whoever is in charge of these events and see if that person can make certain this doesn't happen in the future. However, I'm concerned this might be triangulating and not be covenantal behavior. Would it be okay to do this?

– *Wants to Enjoy the Program*

Dear Wants to Enjoy,

You are to be commended for first speaking directly to the person with whom you had a concern. We promise to do so in our covenant. And regardless of how politely we make our request, it can be a difficult promise to keep when confronting someone we do not know well.

But before discussing how you

might proceed, let's consider what one might do if one sees distracting behavior for the first time. There can be many reasons someone might engage in behavior that is distracting to others. They might be anxious for reasons we can't know, or having problems with medications, or be compulsive about cleanliness, or simply have a difficult time seeing the bigger picture. If the behavior is not an ongoing problem, one response is simply to ignore it. Or, if the distraction is too great, you might start by saying something like, "Thank you for doing that, but I can't concentrate on the program very well. I'll be happy to help you afterward. Would that be okay?"

If the distracting behavior is ongoing, the above words might be more productive than a simple request to stop the behavior. Still, sometimes we don't get immediate agreement with what seems to us to be a perfectly reasonable request. Thus, we are often surprised and unprepared in the moment to continue

the discussion. Taking the time to consider the situation before further action is wise.

You have at least three options. You can initiate another conversation to see if the person will agree to a specific request for behavior change. Or, you can request that the person meet to discuss the issue further with you and the person in charge of these events. Finally, you can speak with the person in charge of the program and ask their advice about the situation. In all three cases, you are not triangulating because you are not asking another to intervene directly on your behalf.

The Healthy Relations Ministry is available to you as a resource if you need help with a difficult situation here at church. It includes Margaret Borden, Ann Edwards, and Sandra Ries. Reach them at [healthyrelations@austinuu.org](mailto:healthyrelations@austinuu.org).

Sincerely,  
*Healthy Relations Covenant*

## Report from the Building Team

We have received a preliminary "Pre-Design Report" from McKinney-York Architects. This includes analyses of materials, plumbing, roofing, landscape slopes, water pathways, air conditioning and heating systems, foundations, etc. They have given us some examples of playground concepts, and possibilities for where to put the money we have to work with. The building team will meet

Dec. 2 to confer about this report.

It is our intention to bring the congregation as a whole into the conversation after we have applied the congregation's stated priorities (from Town Hall meetings in 2014) to the ideas from the architects. These conversations may happen as early as January. Please watch announcements and newsletters for the Town Hall meeting schedule.

## MONTHLY SPECIAL OFFERING



# SafePlace

December's monthly service offering recipient is SafePlace. More than 35 years ago, women's advocates in Austin saw a need to support women in the community experiencing sexual and domestic violence. Within a few short years the Austin Rape Crisis Center (1974) and Center for Battered Women (1977) opened their doors. They were the first rape crisis center and the first shelter in Texas, respectively. The Center for Battered Women was one of the first in the nation, receiving national acclaim as a leading program to offer safety for abused women and their children. In 1999, the two merged to become SafePlace.

In 1981, the shelter was small. The

protection was secrecy and the stays were short. The waiting list was long. As a consequence, many women returned to their abusers, as they did not have the life-changing personal or life skills that they needed.

Today, the services are unimaginably more extensive and the mission more wide ranging. With the motto "Stop Abuse for Everyone," SafePlace offers specialized services for women, men, children, the deaf community, LGBT persons and people with disabilities.

Though SafePlace still provides emergency shelter, hospital accompaniment and legal advocacy and counseling, there is now a school, transitional housing, afterschool care,

support groups for men, and community outreach to prevent abuse with dialogue and education. One remarkable prevention program is Expect Respect, a program of counseling and education for youth and adults on the prevention of dating violence, sexual assault/abuse, domestic violence, and bullying.

Thank you for your ongoing support for this worthy cause which truly transforms lives and promotes justice. Please check [www.safeplace.org](http://www.safeplace.org) for more information on their facilities and services.

*All groups supported by Monthly Special Offerings will receive a check at the end of the year, when the total of the 12 monthly donations will be divided equally.*

## HEALTHY RELATIONS MINISTRY

### Serious Covenant Breach, Disruptive Behavior Policies Revised

Members of First UU have covenants in many of our programs, committees and ministries, from children's religious education classes to our chalice circle groups to our board of trustee meetings. But our most significant covenant is our Covenant of Healthy Relations. This covenant guides us in our day-to-day interactions with each other and helps us through the normal trials and tribulations of being fallible human beings.

But what do we do when someone's behavior is outside the everyday

mistakes we all make? In dealing with such situations, we want to approach them in as covenantal a manner as possible. To that end, two policies were created by our senior minister: the Serious Covenant Breach Policy and the Disruptive Behavior Policy.

The Healthy Relations Ministry (HRM), with guidance from Rev. Meg, has revised both these policies for clarity and comprehensiveness. The policies are meant to ensure the well-being of our congregation when people behave inappropriately. They

can be viewed on the church website under Governance Documents, along with a summary of all church complaint and conflict resolution processes. Copies of the revised policies will be available at the December congregational meeting.

The HRM team will be in the gallery for two Sundays in December to answer questions about the revised policies, how we support the covenant, and to hear your thoughts. The HRM team can be reached at [healthyrelations@austinuu.org](mailto:healthyrelations@austinuu.org).

## NEW AT FIRST UU

# “Transformation through Service” to offer new spiritual growth opportunities

by Carolyn Gremminger

Imagine a program that provides every church member an opportunity to serve our church community in a way that’s meaningful and personally rewarding to them. Imagine every member being able to meet with a church leader for an interview that would assess their skills and interests and match them with service opportunities.

Such a program is currently being developed at First UU: “Transformation through Service.” The Leadership Team, comprised of Reverend Meg, Megan Winget, Pat Walters, Lisa Carroll, Wendy Erisman and myself, is embarking upon a new initiative, originally developed by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Delaware County, that we are making our own.

We are in the pilot phase now, with plans for a full rollout in September 2016. Ultimately, you’ll be able to view service opportunities from throughout the church online. These opportunities range from short-term activities such as helping with Thanksgiving dinner, to leadership roles such as serving as a board member.

This effort is initiated through a “conversation,” where members of the church and a leader will take part in a detailed conversation to explore interests, desires, and skills that the church member wishes to share with the community. The interview will

help the member to assess their skills and interests and then to match them with service opportunities.

The leadership development team has split up this daunting task into two subgroups:

- The Conversation team is working on a script that will engage each congregant in a conversation about past service opportunities that the congregant enjoyed and grew through. The Nominating Committee and other church leaders will be conducting these interviews.
- The Service Opportunity team is hard at work compiling descriptions of all the service opportunities within the church, and is also beginning work on a database and website, so that eventually members will be able to see what opportunities have openings.

One of our values as a congregation is transformation: “to pursue the growth that changes our lives and heals the world.” This value can be realized through service in our community. It is hoped that this program will enhance our church’s culture of service. Our desire is for all church members to experience transformational growth through service in our community. The purpose of the project is to help members find ways to meaningfully engage with service opportunities

I can personally attest to how service has been personally transformative for me. During my fourteen years in our community, I have served on various committees, and I’ve served on the Board of Trustees. I also assist with the Alternative Space Gallery and Paradox Players events. These service opportunities have transformed my relationship with the church community and my view of myself as a leader. The path of service has richly deepened my faith development in Unitarian Universalism.

Spiritual growth arises through service to others, through connection with others, and through serving a higher purpose greater than our individual needs. I have found that taking part in service projects and leadership roles at First UU has increased my feeling of belonging and has brought me into several close friendships that I hold dear and count upon. What service opportunities could do this for you?

We value your input and want to hear from you as we pilot this initiative. Please contact the leadership development team members listed above with any questions, comments, or concerns. For more information on the program we are using as a model, go to [www.uucdc.org](http://www.uucdc.org), click on “serve” and then click on “Growth through Service.”

## SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

# Change a child's life with CASA of Travis County

The First UU Social Action Committee is partnering with Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Travis County to recruit new volunteers who can speak up for a child who's been abused or neglected. When the state steps in to protect a child's safety, a judge appoints a trained CASA volunteer from our community to make independent and informed recommendations in the child's best interest.

CASA volunteers come from every walk of life and share a commitment to improving children's lives, a willingness to learn, and an open mind towards life experiences different from their own. Volunteers complete 39 hours of intensive training and courtroom observation to learn about children, families, the Child Protective Services system, domestic violence, substance abuse, and much more. After being sworn in by a judge, volunteers are assigned to a child or family of children and spend an average

of 15-20 hours a month advocating for the child for at least a year. They get to know the child while also gathering information from the child's family, teachers, doctors, caregivers, and anyone else involved in the child's life. Judges highly value CASA's recommendations, which help them make informed decisions in the child's best interest.

For children who have been abused or neglected, CASA means having a home instead of feeling lost and being a priority instead of feeling invisible. For volunteers, CASA is a life-changing experience that makes our community a better place.

Learn more about this opportunity to help kids by visiting [www.casatravis.org/volunteer](http://www.casatravis.org/volunteer) or calling (512) 459-2272. Additional information is also available at the Social Action table in the gallery after Sunday services, or by contacting Social Action Chair Wendy Erisman at [socialaction@austinuu.org](mailto:socialaction@austinuu.org).

## Young Adults Group events

Join the young adults (ages 18–35) for the next upcoming meetings. Email [youngadults@austinuu.org](mailto:youngadults@austinuu.org) for more details and info on the group. We'll also be organizing monthly brunches after second service, so email us or watch the orders of service for updates! All meetings are typically from 7–9 p.m. with some adjustments based on event time for outings.

**Thurs, Dec. 3:** Volunteer at Becker Elementary's book fair.

Check next month's newsletter for future events!

## Year-end Giving

If you plan on giving a gift of record and want it to count toward your 2015 taxes (and pledge), please be sure to have your gift in the collection on Sunday, Dec. 27, or postmarked before midnight Dec. 31, 2015. Gifts after those dates, even if the check is dated 2015, will not be included in your 2015 end-of-year statement, as the IRS considers them 2016 gifts.

The church office will not be open on Thursday, Dec. 31, but the USPS will be operating normally. We really appreciate your continuing support! Thank you!

PARADOX



PLAYERS

## Auditions for Reader's Theater performance!

**Sat. Dec. 5, 1 p.m.**  
**Mon. Dec. 7, 7 p.m.**  
**Howson Hall**

Paradox Players will hold auditions for a night of relationship-themed short plays, to be performed Reader's Theater style. Rehearsals will begin in January

2016. Performances will be in Feb. 12 & 13 at 8 p.m. and Feb. 14 at 3 p.m. We are seeking all ages and ethnicities for about 16 roles in seven short one-act plays. No memorizing required! Contact Ann Edwards with questions: [readers@austinuu.org](mailto:readers@austinuu.org).

**Eclectic Folk Jam**

**Friday, December 11**  
**Rm. 17**  
**7–10 p.m.**

The Eclectic Folk Jam, an open jam session for singers and instrumentalists, is held on the second Friday of every month. We have “Rise Up Singing” song books, and some people like to bring copies of their favorite songs to pass out. Bring drinks and snacks to share.

Contact Pete and Kim Akenhead at (512) 834-0188, or Mary Jane Ford at (512) 926-4122 or [singalong@austinuu.org](mailto:singalong@austinuu.org).

**UU/Quaker Singalong**

**Saturday, December 26**  
**Friends Meeting House**  
**(3701 E. MLK Blvd.)**  
**7:30–10:30 p.m.**

Please bring snacks and finger foods, musical instruments, and copies of songs you want to sing. Copies of “Rise Up Singing” are provided. This is an alcohol-free event, round-robin format, held on the fourth Saturday of every month.

Contact Larry Vaughn at (512) 469-0029 or Mary Jane Ford at (512) 926-4122 or [singalong@austinuu.org](mailto:singalong@austinuu.org).

**WORSHIP SERVICES**

SANCTUARY 9:15 AM AND 10:45 AM

**DECEMBER 6****An Upside-Down World:  
A Hymn of Reversal**

REV. MEG BARNHOUSE

The First UU Adult Choir and Orchestra will be joined by musicians from the Austin Symphony and Conspirare in a musical offering of J.S. Bach’s timeless “Magnificat.” The sermon will give background on Mary, her words, and the radical social, political and personal layers of this most ancient of Christian hymns.

**DECEMBER 13****Christmas Pageant!**

REV. MEG BARNHOUSE

It’s the traditional Christmas story, with brief and child-friendly additional words from the ministers. Costumes will be provided, or wear a costume from home: come all ye shepherds, animals, angels, stars, cupids, wise people, etc. Poetic license smiled upon.

**DECEMBER 19****We Gather: Another  
Kind of Worship**

(4:30 p.m.) The new third service is in its own format, different from Sunday mornings. Food and fellowship will follow! Reserve childcare at [childcare@austinuu.org](mailto:childcare@austinuu.org); however, children are very welcome to the service. We will have a carpeted area and coloring materials in Howson Hall.

**DECEMBER 20****The Christians and the Pagans**

REV. MEG BARNHOUSE

Yule is a holiday that shimmers with elements of different cultures. There has been more interaction among peoples, cultures and religions than we sometimes know.

**DECEMBER 24****Holiday Services****5:00 p.m. Family Service**

REV. MARI CABALLERO

**7:00 p.m. UU Lessons and  
Carols**

REV. MEG BARNHOUSE &  
CHRIS JIMMERSON

**DECEMBER 27****Community**

REV. CHRIS JIMMERSON

“Community: To connect with joy, sorrow, and service with those whose lives we touch.” In this second in our sermons series on our church’s religious values, former First UU member Rev. Nell Newton will join Rev. Chris in exploring the foundations for building religious community.

# PUBLIC AFFAIRS FORUM

SANCTUARY AT NOON AFTER SECOND SERVICE

## DECEMBER 6

### Word and Action

WITH TOM PALAIMA, PH.D.

Where do words and stories go? What effect do expressions of thoughts, ideas and values have on the lives we live? Tom Palaima will set the stage for discussing this wish by an Australian soldier, one of 23,000 who were slaughtered during the 141 days of the battle of the Somme in 1916: "For Christ's sake, write a book on the life of an infantryman...and by doing so you will quickly prevent these shocking tragedies."

We have many such accounts, and many familiar and lasting enough to be read by impressionable high school students. "The Things They Carried", "All Quiet on the Western Front", "The Thin Red Line", "Korean Love Songs," "Catch-22," "Dulce Et Decorum Est," "Rich Man's War," "Restrepo." And yet?

Dr. Palaima, a MacArthur fellow for his work in Aegean prehistory and early Greek language and culture, is director of the Program in Aegean Scripts and Prehistory. He has held Fulbright fellowships/professorships in Greece, Austria and Spain, and has been a fellow of the University of Wisconsin Humanities Institute and the University of Texas Humanities Institute. In 2007, he was elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, London. For his public commentaries and service within UT, he was chosen one of three honorable mentions for Longhorn of the Year by the Daily Texan in 2010.

He has lectured, written and taught extensively on the subjects of ancient writing systems, the reconstruction of ancient culture, decipherment theory, Greek language, war and violence studies, ancient religion, ethnicity, feasting ritual, kingship ideology and practice, ethics and leadership, song as an important means of communicating social criticism, and Dylanology.

He has written for the Austin American-Statesman, the Times Higher Education, The Texas Observer and Michigan War Studies Review. He has been featured on NPR and on Wisconsin Public Radio.

## DECEMBER 13

### Trans-Pacific Partnership: NAFTA on Steroids?

WITH JIM CULLEN

President Obama views the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade deal with 12 Pacific nations, including the United States, as an important part of his trade legacy. But for many workers and environmentalists, the TPP looks like a replay of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization, which relaxed trade barriers and empowered multinational corporations without putting in place enforceable regulations to protect labor, the environment and local government sovereignty, resulting in the loss of millions of manufacturing jobs to low-wage countries in the Third World. And progressives are properly suspicious that "free trade" is practically the only policy initiative of Obama's that Republicans support, as the Republican Congress greased the skids for an up-or-down vote under special rules that do not allow filibusters or amendments.

Jim Cullen is editor of The Progressive Populist, a twice-monthly journal of politics and economics based in Manchaca. He is a former daily newspaper reporter and was Austin bureau chief for Hearst Newspapers and associate editor for The Texas Observer in the 1990s before starting The Progressive Populist in 1995 with his brothers who print the Populist at their twice-weekly newspaper in Storm Lake, Iowa. See his website at [www.populist.com](http://www.populist.com) or follow him on Twitter @jimcullen.

## DECEMBER 20

No Forum

## DECEMBER 27

No Forum ■

**First Unitarian  
Universalist  
Church of Austin**

(512) 452-6168

[www.austinuu.org](http://www.austinuu.org)

First UU Ministers

**Rev. Meg Barnhouse**  
**Rev. Marisol Caballero**  
**Rev. Chris Jimmerson**

Director of Music  
**Brent Baldwin**

Office Administrator  
**Andrea B. Sosa**

Membership Coordinator  
**Shannon Posern**

Communications Coordinator  
**Victoria M. Valadez**

Bookkeeper  
**Jamie Schroeder**

Board President  
**Angela Smith**

**First Unitarian  
Universalist  
Church of Austin**

4700 Grover Ave.  
Austin, TX 78756

**From church member Scott  
Butki: *A Compliment from the  
Homeless***

This happened while I was racing to catch up with the NAMI Walk last September. I passed two guys who were homeless. One asked for change. I apologized, and said I could not. So far, standard situation...then it changed in an instant.

"Hey, wait," he said, he and his companion looking carefully at my t-shirt. "I know your church! Your church has the nicest volunteers and the most comfortable places to sleep." I nodded. "Freeze Night?" and his friend said, "He always is up for coming to your church." As the conversation ended, the two of them thanked me and the church for doing all that we do.

I think we just demonstrated once again how we are transforming lives and doing justice. ■

*Happy  
Holidays*

from all of us at  
First UU Austin!

