New Year, New Possibilities

You may have noticed that we did NOT have an ‘Inspiration Sunday’ at the Museum District Campus.

For those of you who have been around for a while, my first year here, we had to do an “Inspiration Sunday” that had been built into the budget by the previous administration. This meant we were supposed to raise $20,000 in one day!

Well, due to the amazing generosity of folks here, we raised just over $20,000 on one Sunday, and by the end of the week, we’d raised $30,000. That first year’s budget also had a suspicious income line (of another $25,000), but by the end of the year we had more than made our budget.

In succeeding years, we managed to reduce the amount of “deficit” spending. Thanks to generous donors, we increased reserves. We came up with, and implemented, a plan to pay back a previous loan from the endowment fund, and we increased cash on hand, and thoroughly cleaned up our finances.

My second year here, we reduced the goal from $45,000 to $30,000. Then last year, down to $20,000. And this year, we were on track to lower it yet again, to $10,000. But, we ended the 2012-2013 year well enough financially, that I proposed to the board (and they agreed) that we simply eliminate it for this year.

This is why we did not have an “Inspiration Sunday” in October. In the last couple of years, we have also had a *Holiday Wish List*. This list is usually 2 or 3 items totaling about $12,000. One year we got new tables and chairs for our fellowship area (Channing Hall), along with a defibrillator, and improved office infrastructure. Last year, we got new furniture for the new staff and for our children’s religious education classrooms. And! A new dishwasher and sanitizer for the kitchen.

But, we didn’t have a Holiday Wish list this year. Several things have come to demand our attention.

One of our church members who has a mobility disability got trapped in the 1st floor women’s restroom. We were reminded of its lack of a place to put a purse, no baby changing area – in essence – an area in major need of an overhaul.

Then we discovered cracks in the fireplace in the Fireside room, which led to a report of a sagging foundation which needs to be taken care of – even before renovating the rest rooms.

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would also be a big ticket item. In October, the board of trustees approved financing for a capital campaign of up to $300,000 to help bring these projects to reality.

In the next month, we will have more information about specific costs, what kinds of plans we’re talking about, and how you can participate.

Rev. Joanna Fontaine Crawford is leading our efforts with a finance team, a playground team, and a facilities team.

The board of trustees (as a group), and I are personally financially committed to the campaign.

Basically, that means we agree to increase or maintain our annual gifts to the church, while making an additional gift of ½ of our pledge. However, we have up to 3 years to spread out that additional gift.

The process is simple and straightforward – there will much more information coming from our Stewardship Team and our Capital Campaign Team in the next month.

In the meantime, I hope you feel as I do – that it is a privilege to be part of a generous, visionary, caring congregation.

Happy New Year!

Daniel

Sermons for January 2014

January 5: Circle of Life. As the Wheel of Life turns again, and midwinter yields to spring, we dedicate our children; name new births; new marriages; honor anniversaries, and recall the departed. Please contact the office if you would like your children dedicated in the church today and provide us with names, ages and which service (9:30 or 11:30) you attend.

January 12: Sloth. Second in our series. The deadly sin is actually “acedia” or spiritual torpor. We say we can’t change the world, or truly love our neighbor, or live up to the standards we espouse. But virtue (like vice) has a level of depth. It isn’t all or nothing. Sermon by the Rev. Daniel O’Connell.

January 19: Ordinary Spirituality. What feeds your spirit and connects you to the universe? Third in our series. Sermon by Rev. Kathleen Ellis

January 26: Greed versus Charity. We begin a new series on an age old problem — one that most of us wrestle with for most of our lives. Sermon by the Rev. Daniel O’Connell.
President’s Report

Treasurer’s Report: In a piece of housekeeping spurred by the merger, the Board passed a resolution recommended by Treasurer Evan Michaelides authorizing the opening of four new accounts at Fidelity to hold the Thoreau Capital Projects Fund, Thoreau Operating Reserve Funds, Museum District Reserve Funds, and Museum District saving account.

Board member resignation: Jim Klein, our Board member from Copperfield, is being transferred to Cambridge England with his work for two years. The Copperfield campus recommended that Tracy Cook replace Jim until the May annual meeting. Tracy has been a past president of Copperfield, is involved at General Assembly, and is very engaged with UBarU (a camp for Unitarians outside of Kerrville). The Board approved her appointment, and she will begin with the Board retreat on January 11. The election at the May annual meeting will determine who will serve out the remaining two years of Jim’s term.

Nominating Committee: Jim Klein and Lucy Anderson presented the Nominating Committee’s procedures and annual calendar. The document will be reviewed by the Nominating Committee in January and submitted to the Board for approval as policy. This policy will systemize Nominating Committee procedures and become a guide for future Nominating Committees and Boards.

Capital Campaign Fund: The Board discussed the need for transparency during the planning process of the renovation of the building (foundation repair, restrooms, and play area for children). Discussions have taken place regarding renovations in the sanctuary to accommodate the music program. The Board confirmed that any renovation project added beyond the original capital campaign projects would require separate Board approval. The Board agreed and emphasized that church members should receive information about the renovation projects and have the opportunity for discussion.

I want to take this time to wish everyone a safe and joyful holiday. At times, holidays can be difficult, and if it is so with you, I hope you take advantage of Richard Braadstad’s Holiday Christmas Potluck at the Museum District. I want to thank Richard for faithfully hosting these potlucks year after year for Thanksgiving and Christmas. He is a model of our community’s spirit.

In Fellowship, Your Board President,
Sheila Whitford

Online Automatic Payment Makes Pledge Fulfillment Easy and Convenient AND Is Great for Church Cash Flow

We have been accepting Electronic Funds Transfer payments from checking and savings accounts, along with Credit Card Payment through Vanco Services for 7 years. We are impressed with their easy-to-use customer interface, their excellent reports and their reasonable prices. You can set up payments for yourself now, at the First Church website, firstuu.org/firstchurchpay.php or fill out and return the Vanco Authorization Form: firstuu.org/pdfs/VANCO_Authorization_Form.pdf. If you have any questions, contact bookkeeper@firstuu.org. We’ll be happy to help you get set up.
Religious Education

Sometimes our lives feel a bit crazy and out of control. We may wonder…. are we paying attention to what is important? It seems we are constantly paying attention to little things like papers coming home from the kid’s schools or the dishes that again need to be washed, or the numerous e-mails that have piled up. It’s like a bunch of lights on our dashboard are constantly lighting up every moment demanding our immediate attention. What then happens to the things that matter the most to us? When we are distracted we might pass by opportunities to feel deeper connections to the life we are living.

This is why I’m starting off the beginning of 2014 with New Year’s Conversations for our RE families and teachers. We want to offer an opportunity to talk about our own spiritual lives and that of our families. So we’ve set aside a time to reflect on and share what brings us to a church community and what we hope to find here. We will be able to connect with one another about our hopes and dreams for our shared future.

Buddha said…. “we are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.” What we spend time doing and thinking about is what we become, is who we are. So, taking some time to reflect on what we are focused on, seems a good step. Join us. Be part of our New Year’s Conversations on January, 12th (9:30 am) or 19th (11:30 am) or 20th (10:30 am). I look forward to getting to know people better and planning our future journey together. More detailed information will be available in the RE 1-2-3 e-news in early January.

See you Sunday,
Carol

In the bleak midwinter, holiday lights blink out and traffic returns to normal levels of frustration. Some of you may be affected by the winter blues, sometimes called seasonal affective depression. At these times it is both important and difficult to reach out to others. A friend counters this depression by making 1000 origami hearts at the rate of 10 per day, then she gives them away. Both the meditative folding and the heart-felt giving lift her spirits as well as those of the recipients.

New calendars mark the turn into 2014. It’s a good time to remember the ancient Roman god of beginnings and transitions. Janus has two faces, so he can look to the future and to the past. The month of January (Ianuarius) was named in his honor.

Having made this turn, we, too, can look backward and forward to remember and anticipate moments of growth. If you look over your old calendar you’ll get a hint of your external priorities — appointments, meetings, and special events. But how are you different from a year ago? What challenges do you face? What steps will you take to meet the challenges and move in the direction of your goals?

Days go by with no fanfare as Earth spins around its axis. What will you make of this day? Of this year?

Rev. Kathleen Ellis, kathleen@firstuu.org
or 512-567-2115

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Help with **Urban Harvest's Annual Fruit Tree Sale**: unload trees on January 17, or help sell or clean up on January 18.

The Social Justice Team is looking for volunteers to help staff the **LGBTQ National Conference**, January 29 - February 2, 2014. The conference will be held at the Hilton of the Americas downtown. Come show the attendees some Texan hospitality. They are also asking Houstonians to provide housing for one night to one guest at the conference.

If you wish to help out either at the conference or with housing for it or for the fruit tree sale, sign up at the Social Justice table in Channing Hall on Sundays or sign up on-line at [firstuu.org/socialjustice.php](http://firstuu.org/socialjustice.php)."

**Healthy Parenting**

Volunteers from Project Row House tutors and mentors, NurturingChild Care, WALIPP tutors and WALIPP mentors each held review meetings to share experiences and problem solve with each other and to make suggestions for next semester.

A Volunteer Appreciation reception will be held Sunday February 2, after the second service across the street in the Vista Lounge at the Venue Museum District.

A Healthy Parenting brochure is being prepared to document each of the programs and the respective volunteers. Thorpe Butler is coordinating this project.

Volunteer in Channing Hall at the Healthy Parenting table or contact Grace Amborski at graceamborski@sbcglobal.net.

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**OUR NOMINATING COMMITTEE NEEDS YOUR HELP!**

Over the next month and a half the Nominating Committee will be soliciting nominations in order to fill next year's positions for the Board of Trustees and the Nominating Committee. The work that these two groups do is both fun and challenging. Members of the Nominating Committee will be hosting tables on **January 5 and January 12, at all three campuses**. All interested candidates will need to complete and submit an application on-line, available on our website, [www.firstuu.org](http://www.firstuu.org), or in hard copy. If you are interested in serving on either the Board of Trustees or the Nominating Committee, please speak with a member of the Nominating Committee and they will give you the details. You may contact us at nominatingcommittee@firstuu.org.
Excerpts from the Treasurer’s Report

Both income and expenses came in under budget in October. The result was something close to a wash.

As has been the case for the past two or three months, pledge income came in slightly, although not dramatically, weaker than budgeted. Additional shortfalls in Shared Offering and Rental brought our total income deficit for the month to about $9,000.

On the expense side, a favorable unbudgeted item was a $6,000 rent credit from the landlord at our Thoreau campus, relating to their use of the facility for some special purposes. This enabled us to skip our $3,800 October rent payment entirely, and will reduce our November payment as well. This, along with a variety of smaller variations from budgeted amounts, resulted in total expenditures of $7,000 less than budgeted, for a net shortfall versus budget of $2,000.

During the month, Copperfield transferred to us $24,000 from their old bank accounts, which are now nearly closed out. These funds are reserved for a building account for the Copperfield campus.

Stewardship Team

The New Year is upon us and the month of giving thanks and giving generously to your church is just around the corner. February will be a month devoted to raising the funds necessary to keep the lights on, our staff employed and our church thriving in this wonderful community. Your Stewardship Team has been working diligently for months to put together some fabulous events to thank you for all of your previous support of our church, and of course to ask you to consider another generous pledge to our mission again this year.

Everyone gives for different reasons. Some among us were raised in a church environment, and no matter the faith have learned that the community provided by their church is one worth supporting. Others have never attended church regularly before, but have found us and discovered a place where they feel welcome, a sanctuary that offers both intellectual stimulation and a place to fill their spirits. Although we all give for different reasons, the fact is only by our pledges do we keep this sanctuary open for all of our community to enjoy.

We’ve had a tremendous year of growth and change. We’ve grown from three separate churches with different agendas and staffs to one church spread across the greater Houston metropolis on three different campuses. We’re combining our resources, maximizing our potential and letting more and more people know what enlightenment they can find on any of our campuses. This work we’re doing could not happen without the generous support of our members. We are an entirely member funded church, and we encourage everyone to support our mission and our community by pledging generously this year.

Join us at our celebration events next month, listen to your ministers speak from the pulpit, and hear testimonials from fellow members who have come to love this church. Be proud of the support you’ve already given to this incredible community, and think about how you can continue your support in the upcoming year. Above all, celebrate the gift that First Church is to all of us, and be grateful that we’ve found one another within its growing walls.
NEW U CLASS

Saturday, January 11, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Fireside Room, First UU Church, Museum District

While the New U Class is primarily a pathway to membership, everyone is welcome, both the curious and those who have already decided to join. We will explore how your spiritual journey led you to us and how UUs talk about religion. You’ll have a short tour of the building and find out the way things run here at First Church. During the class you’ll have the opportunity to meet several church leaders and staff. We’ll do our best to answer your questions.

The day includes a complimentary lunch, giving everybody an opportunity to get better acquainted with each other. Facilitated by church staff and Welcome Team leaders.

Childcare will be available; email names and ages to childcare@firstuu.org by Friday, January 3. We require a minimum of ten participants in the class. Registration is required for the class so please sign up at the church, contact us at office@firstuu.org or call the office at 713–526-5200.

Traveler in Concert

Saturday, January 11, 7:30 p.m.
First Unitarian Universalist Church Museum District

This concert will be a fundraiser for the Thoreau Scholarship Fund. We believe in higher education and support the opportunity for promising Houston high school graduates to be the first in their families to go to college. A $20.00 donation is suggested at the door.

Delicious desserts and fun beverages during intermission. Please bring your favorite dessert to share.
Joseph Priestly Lecture Series
Sunday, January 19, 2014
1:30 p.m.

Global Change By Humans:
Narrowing Choices For Our Future Climate
Ron Sass, Ph.D.

Our climate is changing more rapidly than at any other time in the Earth's history. The average temperature of the world is increasing, with extreme weather events becoming more common. Humans are causing this by excess emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases; other factors, such as small variations in solar output, are vastly outweighed by the changing chemistry of the atmosphere.

As human populations continue to grow, our strategies for energy sources and conservation form a driving choice for our quality of life on the future Earth.

Dr. Sass is currently the Fellow in Global Climate Change at the James A. Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University. During more than five decades as a chemistry and biology professor, his research has included wetland sources of biogenic greenhouse trace gases and the role of methane in particular. He has consulted for the EPA and worked with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, sharing as a member of the IPCC in the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize.
Thinking about becoming a member of First Church?
Membership Day is Sunday, January 5.

To join First Church, we ask that you complete a few forms: New Member Information, Talents and Interests, a Pledge Card that requires a financial commitment, and a Skills Inventory. These forms are available in the office or from a Sunday Morning Welcoming Team member. New members can join on the first Sunday of each month at the Welcome Table in Channing Hall after church.

—Church-wide—

Music Workshop, “Lift Every Voice”

Save the Date!!
Saturday, January 25, 2014

We will have a morning session for choir members, song leaders, musicians and anyone who wants to be an active part of the music program for EACH campus!

The afternoon session will be for anyone to hear what we can really do when we sing together as a congregation. More details to come in the January newsletter.

The workshop will be led by Pam Blevins Hinkle, an instrumentalist, choral conductor, composer, arts administrator, and workshop leader. She has served as choral director for college, church and community choirs for over 20 years, including 13 years as artistic director of the Indianapolis Women’s Chorus, and 14 years as choir director at the Midwest Unitarian Universalist Summer Assembly.
Healthy Communications Team

Team representatives are present at a listening table in Channing Hall between services on Sundays. Although Rev. Daniel’s door is always open, they are available to listen to concerns that you might have and assist you in finding the best avenues for resolutions. The team keeps a journal in which you can enter any comments, compliments and concerns. The team reports to Rev. Daniel on a weekly basis. If you are not here on Sunday, feel free to e-mail the Healthy Conversations Team at hct@firstuu.org.

The team members are Connie Acosta, leader, Robert Barnett, Trish Kolodney and Michael O’Laughlin. Bill Nelson serves as an advisor to the team.

First Church Board Votes to Ordain Gretchen Weis

Ordination Planned for Sunday, January 12, 2014 at 4:00 p.m.

Long-time First Church member Gretchen Weis completed seminary at Meadville Lombard Theological School earlier this year and was cleared by the UUA ministerial fellowship committee in late September to enter into search to become a parish minister. Gretchen wishes to be ordained by First Church and our board of trustees heartily approved her request.

Gretchen’s ordination is scheduled for Sunday, January 12, 2014 at 4:00 p.m. and is open to everyone. Mark your calendars and save the date! Our former interim minister Rev. Dr. David Keyes, who served as Gretchen’s internship teaching pastor this past year in Arlington, Virginia, will join us for the ordination ceremony.

This promises to be a very meaningful and moving ceremony, both for Gretchen as well as for our congregation. Gretchen’s January ordination will be a wonderful way for First Church to kick off its centennial year celebration in 2014. (Our congregation officially declared itself a Unitarian church and joined the American Unitarian Association (the UUA predecessor) one hundred years ago in 1914.)

Our faith ancestors fought hard to break away from their traditional religious roots and win the right to govern their own congregations. This includes the right for each congregation to call and ordain ministers, rather than have ministers assigned to them by bishops or some other denominational governing body. In our tradition, “we, the people” decide who and when we choose to bestow the honor of ministerial ordination. Congregational ordination is a foundational sacrament of our faith. Plan to be there to share in this joyous and historic celebration! Stay tuned for further announcements.
Southwestern Unitarian Universalist Conference  
Chalice Lighter Program  
FALL 2013 CALL

The Fall 2013 Chalice Lighter Call for the Southwestern Unitarian Universalist Conference has been awarded to the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston (Texas). They have requested the grant for the purpose of Creating a Social Justice Rapid Response Network Manager position that will serve the greater Houston area through organizing, communicating, and facilitating on-site Social Justice actions. This position will also develop an on-line presence across congregations.

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston is a growing congregation in the heart of the museum district of Houston. They have a dynamic minister and a brilliant Religious Educator, along with a powerful Social Justice program that includes monthly social action in the local community.

In order to be a Chalice Lighter, each of us gives a minimum of $20 in response to each Call. There are no more than three Chalice Lighter Calls each year. Your contributions to this Call will help the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston. All of your contributions, after minimal expenses are met, go to the Chalice Lighter grantee until the Call is closed on 3/31/14. Please give as generously as you can.

As we move into the future of the Southern Region's four distinct District Chalice Lighting programs, we invite you to make a pledge to support the Chalice Lighter program for your District. We have enclosed a form for that purpose. Please complete and return the pledge form in the enclosed envelope with your gift for this Call. We have also enclosed a “Change of Information” slip, so you can notify us of a change of address or a change in your pledge amount. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call the Region's Chalice Lighter Program Coordinator, Glenn Johnson at (704) 549-0750.

Please make copies of this letter and distribute them to the members of your congregation. Talk to your friends at church about the Chalice Lighter Program. Most importantly, tell them about this exciting opportunity in Houston, and please send your check, payable to “SWUUC Chalice Lighters,” to the Regional Chalice Lighter office:

SWUUC Chalice Lighters  
9704 Mallard Creek Road  
Charlotte, NC 28262

You can also donate online by using the SWUUC’s Chalice Lighter page on the Southern Region website, where a PayPal feature is provided: http://www.uuasouthernregion.org/clsuuuc.html. The Fall 2013 SWUUC Call will close on March 31, 2014; please send your gift promptly. A wonderful opportunity is under way in Houston for Unitarian Universalism and we hope you will join us in our enthusiastic support of this Chalice Lighter Call. Thank you for your generosity of spirit and resources.

The SWUUC Chalice Lighter Committee
GO GREEN
This newsletter is available Online. We email a link to the newsletter each month and to First Church Now each week. To choose this option, contact church@firstuu.org.

Rev. Dr. Daniel O’Connell, Senior Minister
Rev. Joanna Fontaine Crawford, Minister
Rev. Kathleen Ellis, Minister
Rev. Bonnie Vegiard, Minister
Rev. Robert Schaibly, Minister Emeritus

Carol Burrus, Religious Educator
Jason Oby, Music Director
Bob Fazakerly, Accompanist

Peggy Harvey, Administrator
Tom Cowen, Publications
Jessica Pierce, Nursery
Stuart O’Bannon, Media
Gustavo Hernandez, Weekend Sexton
Hilman Laws, Weekday Sexton

Church Office Hours
Monday to Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Sundays, 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

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