



FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

First Church News

April
2011

Worship and
Religious
Education
for Children and
Youth

Sundays
10:30 a.m.



5200 Fannin
Houston, TX
77004
713.526.5200

Email:
church@firstuu.org

Is Gandhi in Hell?

There is a big controversy going on in the evangelical Christian world. It happens every once in a while.

This time, Rob Bell, a young evangelical pastor of a 10,000 member church, called by *Time* magazine “a singular rock star in the church world,” published a book out in early March: *Love Wins: Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*.

Like so many Universalist preachers of the last two centuries, Bell argues that a loving God would not send humans to hell forever for eternal torment. Bell doesn't claim to be a Universalist, but his evangelical brethren are about to try and boot him out of the fold.

As the president of the flagship school of the Southern Baptist Convention, Albert Mohler put it in a recent blog post:

“The vast majority of men and women throughout the centuries of western civilization have awakened in the morning and gone to sleep at night with the fear of hell never far from consciousness - until now.”

“Sin has been redefined as a lack of self-esteem rather than as an insult to the glory of God. Salvation has been reconceived as liberation from oppression, internal or external. The gospel becomes a means of release from bondage to bad habits rather than rescue from a sentence of eternity in hell.”

<http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/03/10/doing-away-with-hell-part-two>

To which I would say: nicely put. Evangelical Christians will tell you Christianity makes no sense without hell, the resurrection, and a literal understanding of everything in the bible, and that it must all be true - no doctrine stands alone.

But this ignores centuries of scholarship or a divergence of opinion on what a text “actually” means.

Is Gandhi in hell? The evangelicals would say ‘yes,’ since Gandhi wasn't a Christian. Unitarian Universalists would say ‘no.’ I believe we are already saved, and with Rob Bell, I would agree: *Love Wins*.

I'll be preaching about this on our theme of the month for April 2011: *Salvation*.

See you in church!

Daniel



Sunday Worship, 10:30 a.m., April 3
Anniversary Sunday
Rev. Kaaren Anderson, guest minister
“Social Justice with a Punch”



Join us as we celebrate our 97th anniversary as a UU congregation and the first anniversary of our calling the Rev. Dr. Daniel O’Connell to our ministry. We’re having a special music program to celebrate and a guest minister, the Rev. Kaaren Anderson, from the First Unitarian Church in Rochester, N.Y. Rev. Anderson emphasizes the quest for boldness in living and loving and describes herself as a spiritual nontheist who believes in grace. She has introduced an ambitious social justice program at her church in Rochester and is the author of *Glad to be Human*.

This Anniversary Sunday officially opens our annual canvass pledge drive. We have an exciting opportunity this year to double our pledge dollars with a matching fund. Several members have staked \$30,000 for a challenge fund. Every dollar you pledge over last year’s amount will be matched, dollar for dollar, up to \$30,000. Don’t pass up an opportunity to easily increase your support of First Church!

Pledge packets will be handed out before church to be opened after the sermon. Consider what First Church and its programs mean to you. Those ready to make their pledge will hand in their cards during the service. On April 10, 17 and 24, we will have tables set up in Channing Hall staffed by members of the Stewardship Team to collect the remaining pledge cards.

Mark your calendars. We look forward to celebrating with you on Sunday, April 3. Come out and listen to wonderful music, hear an inspiring speaker and pledge your support of First Church. We promise a delicious surprise for everyone.

We’re Making It Better. Another reason to celebrate!

April 10 - “A History of Hell” Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Daniel O’Connell

April 17 - “UUs: Good for Nothing?” Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Daniel O’Connell

April 24 - Easter Sunday - Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Daniel O’Connell

CARE TEAM

The Care Team will meet on **Sunday, April 24, at 12:15**. Meetings are open to anyone who is interested in what the Care Team does. Contact CareTeam@firstuu.org.

HOW IS YOUR SOUL, MY FRIEND?

If you have any pastoral needs, we are here to help. Our Care Team, Befrienders and clergy are available for you. No matter how large or small you may think your need is, don’t hesitate to contact us. Rev. Adam Robinson, 713-526-5200 or adam@firstuu.org

NEWS FROM OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Your Board of Trustees met on Wednesday, March 16, and had a discussion of our church finances, how we can maintain our momentum, organize our financial house and focus on the long-term growth of First Church.

Daniel always assigns the Board members spiritual homework. I am going to ask that you look at your calendar for May and June and also do your **fiscal homework**. Circle your calendar for a special meeting on Sunday, May 15, as the Board would like to present various options for dealing with our loans from our board designated Endowment Fund.

On May 15, 2008, we were authorized by the members to borrow up to \$70,000 from our endowment. The value of the endowment at that time was \$345,028. In reality we only borrowed a total of \$54,000. This loan was necessary to resolve our co-ministry and to honor our agreements with Gail Lindsay Marriner and Jose Ballester. It was the right thing to do. This loan coupled with a previous loan has caused us to owe ourselves \$67,000 currently.

We want to explore our options to make sure that our payback formula does not slow us down and to retain our current staff and compensate them fairly. The value of our endowment is currently \$375,314, thanks largely to investment earnings from the improving economy. Once we resolve how to manage this portion of our debt we want to have a budget meeting for our next fiscal year. This budget presentation will be on Sunday, May 22.

We are not a complicated organization – this year our operating revenue is \$664,804, and pledges from members constitute almost 85% of that reve-

nue.

Our break-even budget is the same. We expect to spend \$664,804, and the majority of that expense is compensation and benefits for our great staff. I hope you will honor your current pledge and consider increasing it in the next fiscal year.

Last, our final meeting for this church year will be our general annual meeting on Sunday, June 5. And, if we have done our homework well and made our pledges we can celebrate our past year and look forward to a relaxing summer.

Please help me. Talk with your elected board members on Sunday mornings, attend the May meetings, do your homework, ask questions. I feel really good about where we are at First Church, and I want to belong to a successful, growing, well managed church that is meeting your spiritual needs and is a positive force in the com-

- May 15 - Endowment Loan Meeting
- May 22 - Budget Meeting
- June 5 - Annual Meeting



From the left, top row: Peter Durkin, President; Earl Dredge; Lydia Luz, Vice-President; Sheila Whitford; Wendy Van Syckle; Mike Hart; Carolyn Leap. From the left, bottom row: Hazel Heddings; Evan Michaelides, Treasurer; Rita Saylor; Rev. Daniel O’Connell, Senior Minister; Ron Cookston; Lucy Anderson. Not pictured: Steve Braun; Rosita Kirkman, Parish Clerk.



Everyone in their 20s and 30s is invited to join other young adults after the worship service on the first Sunday of every month. Join us in the courtyard as soon as possible after worship, and then head over to a local restaurant for a good meal, great conversation, fun and fellowship.

Join us on Sunday, April 3, after church.

NOTES FROM THE JOURNEY

By Adam Robinson, Assistant Minister

Frequently I have really interesting conversations with people when I'm out and about. It's not every day that folks in the community run into a minister who, with great enthusiasm, embraces both his vocational calling as a clergy person and his leadership in the community as a somewhat extreme queer. Alas, sometimes my evenings of just wanting to be Adam are interrupted by "So preacher, explain to me..."

More often than not I find that these conversations have to do with theologies that people just can't seem to set aside. On one extreme, people sometimes have a clearly defensive, argumentative, belligerent stance towards religion or they come meek, scared, almost weeping to figuratively kneel and confess. Either way there is fear that drives them to engage in asking me those "big" questions. They are afraid they won't be saved.

So I usually change my plans and stop batting my eyes at that guy across the room and take time to listen. In all of my listening there inevitably comes a question about what I believe is going to happen after we die.

My answer is simple and complex all at the same time. And in a nut shell here it is: I don't know.

I don't usually leave them there with nothing. John Murray encourages me not to leave them with hell but rather some sort of hope. I usually continue by saying I don't know. But what I can say is that whatever happens is going to be way beyond my control after I am gone. What I can control is the here and now. What I can do is decide every moment whether to create heaven or hell for myself and others right here and right now. And you know what, if I do my best I believe that whether there is something to come or nothing to come I have saved my soul and perhaps the soul of another too.

We have lots of opportunities to touch broken and wounded people. Look deep into their eyes next time and see if you see people who are paralyzed by fear from a vision of salvation that is not as all encompassing as ours. And take the time to touch their soul and become a savior in your own way.

Peace and Light
Rev Adam

Join the Sanctuary Choir for a Sumptuous Indian Dinner Saturday, April 2nd at 6 PM in Channing Hall

A full course Indian dinner will be served including appetizers and wine and beer to start. After dinner we will have a performance by exotic temple dancers (not from the choir). We will also have slides and stories from the recent trip by First UU members. Please join us!

The cost is \$35/person (all proceeds go to the church). To make a reservation contact Laura Nagel by email: lauranagel@sbcglobal.net. Please let us know as soon as possible!



Spanning the Ages

By Natalie Browne, Director of Lifespan Faith Development

SALVATION

I just finished reading a book by John D. Crossan entitled *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now*. I recommend it highly for a variety of reasons, but given this month’s theme of Salvation, I will focus on that part of writing. I do so for all of us who shudder at the word “salvation” because it brings memories of guilt because we were taught that God had to kill Jesus because of our sins. I remember one particular evening far in the interior of Brazil: I had just left the mid-week service after singing *Beneath the Cross of Jesus*, the stars were shining and tears were coursing down my cheeks at the words,

And from my stricken heart with tears two wonders I confess

The wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness.

Talk about guilt! Rather than feeling saved, I felt totally imprisoned by the need to live up to what Jesus had done for me and a little afraid of a God who was willing to kill his own son.

Crossan forces the reader to grapple with his well-supported view that the Bible has conflicting views depending on the author(s) you are reading. When it comes to salvation, he postulates that Jesus was intent on fighting the Roman Empire and in so doing, held to the belief that the kingdom of God lay in following nonviolent distributive justice as opposed to the violent “seize and conquer” approach the Romans took. He held that the kingdom of God was already here (not sometime in the future) for those who accepted his premise of peace through justice. Thus, salvation was to stop being like the Romans whether in his time or now in ours.

What a different concept of salvation than the one that so many Christians have adopted over the years as Jesus’ original message has been distorted again and again. It is salvation that I need as I struggle to live on the side of love in my pursuit of justice and the kingdom. And you?

HOUSTON AREA UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SPRING MUSIC FEST

**Nuturing Our Liberal Mojo - Saturday, April 30, 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., rain or shine
Unitarian Fellowship of Houston, 1504 Wirt Road, Houston**

Come have free family fun with UUs from all eight Houston area congregations at the annual UU Spring Music Fest. Enjoy music of all sorts by UU performers, arts and crafts, vendors, belly dancers, hula-hoopers, and the kid’s playground. Hotdogs, ice cream, popcorn and beverages will be offered for a donation. Bring kids, a picnic, cooler, lawn chairs, blankets, hand drums, hula hoops, and a large smile!



**Sponsored by the Houston UU Network
www.uuhouston.org**

LIFESPAN FAITH DEVELOPMENT OFFERINGS FOR ADULTS AND YOUTH

Welcome to Lifespan Faith Development at First Church where we provide tools to help us grow spiritually, build stronger families, improve relationships and make the world a better place.

A complete and detailed list of the April programs can be found at www.firstuu.org/pdfs/LFD_Current_Offerings.pdf.

FINDING YOUR WAY AT FIRST CHURCH (for our guests)

Sundays, 11:40 a.m. or immediately after the service, lasting about 20 minutes.

Come for an informal conversation after the service. The Meditation Room is between the Sanctuary and Channing Hall. It is a pleasant place where you can meet members who will answer your questions while you enjoy a cup of coffee. You'll still have time for lunch in Channing Hall if you wish.



ISLAM IN THE EYES OF AN ARTIST

Sunday, April 3, 12:15 p.m.

Facilitator: Ezzat I. Abouleish, M.D.

Dr. Abouleish has been painting all his life and on a full-time basis since January 2001. He integrates his art into his lecture because it is a universal language which he believes explains Islam better than words. He will talk about Islam, a major world religion followed by one and a half billion people. He hopes to convey the deep message that "spirituality unites people of all faiths and brings peace to earth." A discussion will follow the talk. Child care available if reservations are made by March 27. Please email childcare@firstuu.org with names and ages of children who need care.

EXPLORING MINDFULNESS: Practicing Awareness in Our Everyday Lives

Seven Sundays, April 3 – 24, (skip May 1), May 8 – 22, 9:15-10:15 a.m.

Facilitators: Carol Schwarten and Pam Perry

Newcomers are welcome each week. No experience is needed. Each Sunday we will practice mindfulness using readings, guided meditations, discussion, writing or contemplation and mindfulness practices.

The topics and will include:

April 3: What is Mindfulness?

April 17: Nurturing Nonjudgment

May 1: *No program: Spring Retreat Weekend*

May 15: Compassion

April 10: Letting Go and Being Present

April 24: Awareness of Our Thoughts and Feelings

May 8: Body Awareness and Healing

May 22: Gratitude and Joy in Everyday Life



NEW U CLASS

Saturday, April 9, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., Facilitators: Rev. Daniel O'Connell and others

Primarily a pathway to membership, everyone is welcome. 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. Please sign up at the Information Table in Channing Hall or call the office at 713-526-5200. Childcare will be available; email the names and ages of your children to childcare@firstuu.org by Friday, April 1.

LIFESPAN FAITH DEVELOPMENT OFFERINGS CONTINUED

UU BIBLE STUDY

Sundays, April 10, May 8, 22, 29, and June 12 at 12:15

Facilitator: Rev. Bonnie Vegiard

Join Rev. Bonnie for an open and wide-ranging exploration of the Biblical texts. Rev. Bonnie seeks to help liberal religious people feel confident about their knowledge of where the Biblical texts came from. It's lots of fun to know what scholars say about why they say what they say. This course will take an historical-critical approach to the Bible, putting the texts in their context, which helps us know what we can and what we cannot take from them to apply to our lives today.



GREAT BOOKS DISCUSSION GROUP

Second Sunday of each month at 12:15

The discussion for the month of April will be a selection from "A Room of One's Own" by Virginia Woolf in the Great Books Anthology *Identity and Self Respect*.

For information contact graceamborski@sbcglobal.net.

THE GREAT IDEAS GROUP

Second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at 7:00 p.m.

Study the great thinkers, great writers, great religions, and great ideas of the past and present. We will have a series of discussions on science and religion with lectures and materials drawn from a variety of sources. For more information contact Eric Botts or Wendy Rodewald.

ONGOING LIFESPAN FAITH DEVELOPMENT GROUPS

SECOND FRIDAY MOVIE AND POTLUCK - No potluck or movie during April.

SUNDAY MORNING BOOK GROUP at 8:30

UU CHANGING WOMEN - Sunday at 9:15

MEN'S GROUP - Sunday at 11:45

SUNDAY DISCUSSION CIRCLE at 12:15

GREAT BOOKS DISCUSSION GROUP (Second Sunday) at 12:15

PARENTS GROUP (Fourth Sunday) at 12:15

MONDAY NIGHT YOGA FOR BEGINNERS at 7:00

TUESDAY NIGHT T'AI CHI at 6:15

GREAT IDEAS DISCUSSION GROUP (Second and Fourth Tuesdays) at 7:00

FRIDAY MORNING POETRY GROUP at 10:00

SATURDAY MORNING YOGA at 9:00

SATURDAY MORNING T'AI CHI at 10:30

FROM THE SOCIAL JUSTICE TEAM

These reports are available in full on the church website at http://www.firstuu.org/treasurer_reports.php.

Justice Sunday 2011: Justice Is Aid with Dignity

On **April 10**, Justice Sunday, we will stand shoulder to shoulder with UU congregations nationwide to put our principles into practice.

This year's Justice Sunday culminates our efforts to gain a deeper understanding of how human rights bring the invisible survivors of disaster into the light.

Our worship and social action will spotlight issues affecting people both close to home and around the world. With the **Unitarian Universalist Service Committee**, we will offer meaningful advocacy and action, so together we have a stronger voice and deeper impact toward advancing human rights.

The **Social Justice Task Force** will again meet on **Saturday, April 2**, at the church, at 10:30.

TREASURER'S REPORT - MARCH 16

Expenses came in roughly as budgeted. Income, however, lagged budgeted amounts by about \$5,000. About \$4,000 of that shortfall was in current pledges collected. Current pledges had been coming in ahead of schedule during the first half of the fiscal year, so we anticipated that they would come in behind schedule for the second half. However, a note of caution is in order here. If the monthly shortfalls in current pledge income continue at this pace, we will end up collecting less than originally expected for the full year.

Here are some numbers to illustrate this potential concern. As of the end of February current pledges were still \$8,000 over budget year to date. But this figure has been dropping lately and, as already mentioned, we received \$4,000 less in February than budgeted. There are three months left in the fiscal year. If the total shortfall in current pledges over those coming three months is more than \$8,000, we will end up with less current pledge income than budgeted for the year, which will not be helpful either for our overall financial condition or for the cash flow situation in particular. We intend to monitor this situation carefully in the coming months.

On the positive side, the increase in outside rental income is continuing. We are now \$5,000 ahead for the year having received more than double what we budgeted year-to-date. If this continues, the positive effect on our bottom line will be significant.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Notes from the Stewardship Team

We look forward to your insights and comments. Please e-mail us at stewardship@firstuu.org.

The Stewardship Team is especially excited as First Church initiates the annual canvass pledge drive. Twenty-two loyal and enthusiastic members of the congregation have stepped forward and promised to double every dollar increase in this year's pledges (up to \$30,000.) This means a potential overall increase of \$60,000 for our next fiscal year budget. Never before have we offered a matching fund opportunity like this. What an incredibly easy way to double your support this year!

As you prepare to fill out this year's pledge card, think about how we are making it better and how things can yet be made better. First UU is your church. Your promise to support First Church and its programs is the practical application of your beliefs, your values and your passions.

SHARING SUNDAY
MORNING OFFERINGS

EXPANDED
MUSIC
PROGRAM

CARE TEAM
AND
BEFRIENDERS

LIFESPAN FAITH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

TWO CHURCH MEMBERS
ENTERING THE MINISTRY

ENERGIZED SOCIAL
JUSTICE MINISTRY

GUEST AT YOUR TABLE
AND
UU SERVICE COMMITTEE

RECYCLING AND
FAIR TRADE COFFEE

DEDICATED
OFFERINGS

IMPROVED
FACILITIES



We're Making It Better

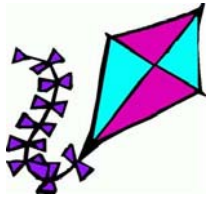
AFFIRMING LOVE BEYOND
BELIEF:
TRANSFORMING
OURSELVES, HOUSTON
AND THE WORLD

LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT

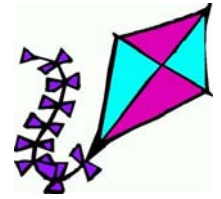
TEACHING OUR CHILDREN BY
LIVING OUR VALUES AND
ENCOURAGING RELIGIOUS
EXPLORATION

MINISTERS DISCRETIONARY FUND

HOME FOR
RELIGIOUS
LIBERALS IN
THE HEART OF
HOUSTON



**Kite Day – April 17, 12 noon to 3:30 p.m.
at Stude Park**



Everyone is invited to Stude Park after the service on Sunday, April 17, for kite flying fun. Church youth will have sandwiches for sale at the church before you leave and kites will be available for sale as well if you need one. Also, bring hula hoops, bubbles, frisbees, lawn chairs and sun screen. Don't miss out on this opportunity to relax and have fun with friends.

ADULTS WITH CHILDREN AT HOME



**You are invited by the Adult Programs Team
to a focus group whose primary topic will be:**

*What would you attend if it were
offered at First UU Church?
Sunday, April 17, 9:15 a.m.*

**This is your opportunity to help shape
future Adult Programming offerings.
A light and tasty breakfast will be served.
Please join us.**

**FIRST UU CHURCH SPRING NATURE RETREAT
April 29 - May 1, 2011**

Don't miss out on our church's annual retreat to the Piney Woods Conservation Center the last weekend of April. You will experience fellowship, relaxation and renewal with the opportunity for lots of rocking in chairs overlooking the rich greenery of the woods, hiking, fishing in nearby Rayburn Lake, and a variety of optional workshops. Have kids? They will delight in the freedom to play in the safe environs of the Center and to enjoy simple crafts, canoes, and other children.

Since space is limited, early registration is recommended.

Pick up a registration form in Channing Hall or simply go to http://firstuu.org/pdfs/spring_retreat_2011.pdf



APRIL 2011

Every Sunday Morning

8:30 Early Morning Book Group
 9:00 Changing Women
 10:30 Worship Service
 10:30 RE for Children and Youth

11:30 Lunch
 11:40 Finding Your Way at First Church
 11:45 Men's Group
 12:00 Sunday Discussion Circle

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
3 Anniversary Sunday See: Every Sunday Morning 9:15 Exploring Mindfulness 11:45 Young Adult Lunch 11:45 New Member Sign Up 1:15 Climate Protection 11:45 Islamic Artist	4 7:00 Beginner's Yoga	5 5:30 Beginners Tai Chi 6:15 Tai Chi Class 7:00 Great Ideas	6	7 7:00 Peace Forum 7:30 pm Choir Practice	1 10:00 Poetry in Motion 12:00 AL-ANON 7:30 Folk Dancing	2 9:00 Yoga 10:30 Tai Chi 10:30 Social Justice Task Force
10 "A History of Hell" See: Every Sunday Morning 9:15 Exploring Mindfulness 11:40 Welcome Guests 12:15 Great Books 12:15 UU Bible Study	11 7:00 Beginner's Yoga 7:00 Rhythm of Life	12 5:30 Beginners Tai Chi 6:15 Tai Chi Class 7:00 Stewardship	13 5:30 Welcome Team 6:30 Adult Programs	14 7:00 Web Team 7:30 Choir Practice	15 10:00 Poetry in Motion 12:00 AL-ANON 7:30 Folk Dancing	16 9:00 Yoga 10:30 Tai Chi
17 "UUs: Good for Nothing?" See: Every Sunday Morning 9:15 Adult Focus Group 9:15 Exploring Mindfulness 11:40 Welcome Guests	18	19 5:30 Beginners Tai Chi 6:15 Tai Chi Class 7:00 Great Ideas	20 7:00 Board of Trustees	21 7:30 Choir Practice 7:00 Beginner's Yoga	22 10:00 Poetry in Motion 12:00 AL-ANON 7:30 Folk Dancing	23 9:00 Yoga 10:30 Tai Chi
24 Easter Service See: Every Sunday Morning 9:15 Exploring Mindfulness 11:40 Welcome Guests 12:00 Care Team 12:15 Parents Group	25 10:00 Newsletter Crew 7:00 Beginner's Yoga 7:00 Befrienders	26 5:30 Beginners Tai Chi 6:15 Tai Chi Class 7:00 Stewardship	27	28 7:30 Choir Practice	29 10:00 Poetry in Motion 12:00 AL-ANON 7:30 Folk Dancing	30 9:00 Yoga 10:30 Tai Chi

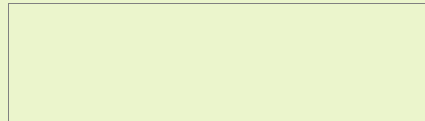
First Unitarian Universalist Church

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Material**



First Church News

If you prefer reading the newsletter online and do not wish to have a copy mailed to you, please let the office know, office@firstuu.org.



A Community of Love Beyond Belief:
Transforming Ourselves, Houston and the World

**Office Hours: Monday to Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Sunday 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.**

Rev. Dr. Daniel O'Connell, Senior Minister
Rev. Adam Robinson, Assistant Minister
Natalie Browne, Director of Lifespan Faith Development
Peggy Harvey, Director of Administration
Tom Cowen, Facilities Manager
Jason Oby, Music Director
Bob Fazakerly, Organist
Hilman Laws, Weekday Custodian
Aaron Laws, Weekend Custodian

Rev. Robert L. Schaibly, Minister Emeritus

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