Love and the Late-Stage Pandemic

Things are changing, as they always do. It feels like things are getting better, doesn’t it? They really are, but there’s still a long way to go. Many people are vaccinated, but not everyone—including members of our staff. Children aren’t vaccinated and we don’t know when that will happen. People who are vaccinated may still be able to transmit the virus. And variants are more contagious and possibly more dangerous. It’s still a time for caution, even though we are so weary and we’re longing for the things we’ve lost during the pandemic.

Our COVID Advisory Council is struggling with these longings as they wrestle with the science and the uncertainty. They have been brilliant as they bring their UU values to the hard decisions that they are empowered to make on behalf of the congregation. I want to name them and thank them all right now: Heather Clark, Jon Eldredge, James Probasco, Mikaela Renz-Whitmore, Richard Sonnenberg, Raven Reed Starr, and Carla Williams. I’m so grateful to these folks.

The church will re-open eventually, and that will be a joyous day. And sooner than that, our larger communities will re-open and we will all have our personal opportunities to re-engage with the larger world. This re-emerging is an opportunity to learn about so many things. We’ll learn about what really gives us joy. We’ll learn about what we’re actually happy to leave behind in the pre-pandemic days. Perhaps we’ll adjust what we think is important.

Even if these are positive things, let’s not forget that change and learning are hard. Let’s be patient with ourselves and each other as we transition. We’re not transitioning back to the old way. It’s a new way and it’ll be confusing and weird and a little exhausting. Each of us will react differently, and THAT’S OK.

There’s one thing I know: In the past year, I’ve watched this congregation pull together, look out for each other, and dig deep. This pandemic was a test of our UU values, and I saw the power of living into those values. For all the pain that the last year brought, there was so much beauty too. Now more than ever, I believe in this faith, this movement.

Here’s another thing: The virus pandemic may be drawing to an end, but we are still in other pandemics that require just as dramatic a response, even if the government isn’t going to initiate that response. The pandemics of climate change, racism, sexism, and so much more are upon us. This congregation is fighting those pandemics, and I hope that the energy freed by the end of the virus pandemic will be turned towards those fights. I’m rooting for you!

Finally, I want to note that Rev. Angela’s sabbatical is ending soon. She returns to us—hopefully rested and renewed—on June 1. The months she was away have been a challenge for the staff and myself (and for the congregation, too). I’ll say this: The staff and lay leaders have been absolutely great in her absence. It is their skill that kept this church running while Angela was away, and I encourage you to thank them. And at the same time, I thank you, dear congregants, for all the ways you show up. I’m so grateful.
Virtual Worship
Sundays at 11:00 am
Led by our ministers and music director, all of our Zoom worship services are intergenerational, and contain a message for all ages as well as music and a homily.
Enter Meeting ID: 168 223 701 or click here.

May 2
“Story Is a Calling”
Beth Elliot, Alana Rodriguez, & Emily Kuo-Lillie
Sharing stories connects us and helps us better understand each other and what we are called to do together.
Music: Tom Godfrey, guitar. Pauline LaBar-Shelton, soprano

May 9
“Resilient Democracy”
Dr. Mike Hogue, Guest Minister
Mike Hogue is the father of three amazing kids (ages 10, 12, 21) who are growing up too quickly! He is a dog person by nature and upbringing, but his wife, from whom he has learned many things, has taught him to love a couple of cats, too. He is a Professor of Theology at Meadville Lombard Theological School. His most recent book is *American Immanence: Democracy for an Uncertain World*.
Music: Lasotras, videos of live, socially-distanced performances from this pandemic year

May 16
“One Brick at a Time”
The Rev. Xolani Kocela, Guest Minister
How do we create the story of our life? We go about it one brick at a time. Our lives are made of many stories which come from many sources. We build stories upon stories as we become who we are. Let’s explore a few stories and ideas about who we are as individuals, a community, and as Unitarian Universalists. This is a joint service with our sibling congregation in Las Cruces!
Music: Special guest Randy Granger, Native multi-instrumentalist and singer-songwriter

May 23
Rev. Dr. Nicole Kirk, Guest Minister
Music: First Unitarian’s Virtual Chalice Choir

May 30
“Same Storm, Different Boats”
The Rev. Bob LaVallee
Late-stage capitalism has fostered incredible income inequality, exacerbating other issues like climate change, racism, and sexism. In addition, it diminishes our hearts, minds, and souls. How can UUs protect themselves and others from this blight?
Music: Classical tracks from Gabriel Longuinhos and friends, and the Petroglyph String Quartet

Virtual Vespers
Wednesdays at 7:00 pm
These short (25-minute) services offer a midweek respite with readings, music, meditation, and prayer.
Enter Meeting ID: 593 831 292 or click here.

We Light a Candle
We grieve with the family and friends of Dick Bailey, who died peacefully in Oregon on April 14. He was 99. He and his wife, Eleanor, were beloved members of First U and of the Penguin Family.
We hold Denise Bleakley and Alane Brown in our hearts as they grieve the deaths of their fathers.
We mourn with the family and friends of Dewitt Bolden, who blessed our services many times with his beautiful voice.
We send healing thoughts to Kathleen Rhoad, who is coping with health issues. Kathleen has moved into an assisted living facility and would welcome cards and calls from her First U friends. Contact the church office for her new address.

If you’re experiencing difficulties, health issues, or transitions, you can reach out to our Caring Network at caring@uuabq.org.
Membership Milestones

A warm welcome to our newest members, who joined the church in April!
Philip Hughes-Luing
John Reeve

Happy Membership Anniversary to:
Twenty-Five Years
Maria Stevens

Are You Ready to Join the Church? We will have our next virtual joining ceremony on Sunday, May 2 at 12:15 pm. If you have not done so yet, please fill out an “I’m Ready to Join” form on our website under “Connect—Becoming a Member.”

Music Notes with Susan Peck
Our Sunday worship services in May will be enlivened by the music of local band Lasotras, grupo folclorico, who play justice music from El Salvador, México, and the US. Their music will be featured in the prelude, Joys & Concerns, and postlude all month. Log on early for a lively prelude: Ojalá que llueva café (Let it rain coffee)!

The Latest from Family Promise
First Unitarian continues to joyfully support Family Promise Albuquerque. Family Promise is a national organization supporting families experiencing homelessness. Support is provided for a minimum of 90 days with housing, food, and assistance in acquiring a place to live with their family. We have been supporting this project for 5 years with meals, food, laundry, and supplies. Thank you to current volunteers Martha Cook, Ruth Ann Cooper, Emily Douglas, Paula Fisher, Judy Goering, Holly Hollis, Melisa Nicoud, Jenny Parsons, Chris Ramsay, Bridget Schweri, Kevin Whitmore, and Sara Wofford.

Family Promise ABQ has moved into their new space at 1516 San Pedro Dr NE, 87110, which—after renovations—will include room to house up to 8 families along with their resource center and offices. The families will remain at Church of the Good Shepherd until these renovations are complete.

Thank you to our First U community for your continued support! Please send any financial donations to Family Promise ABQ at the San Pedro address above.

Staff News
Our Church Administrator, Jess Bess, has accepted a full-time position with UNM and left her job with First Unitarian as of May 1. Jess has been a crucial member of our staff team during her year on the job, helping us navigate these unusual pandemic times with warmth, humor, and grace. We wish her every happiness in her future career and look forward to still seeing her in our worship services. Thank you for everything you’ve done for our community, Jess!

Coming Soon: Caught in the Act!
The Radical Generosity Team knows that generosity comes in many different forms, and it’s important for us all to see the ways our congregation has been contributing to the church and community at large during these challenging times. In order to recognize the many acts of generosity done on a daily basis, we’re bringing back the “Caught in the Act” program we had a few years ago. Please watch this space and our social media accounts for updates on how you can catch someone in the act!

SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING
SUNDAY, MAY 16 AT 2:00 PM ON ZOOM
ALL MEMBERS ARE REQUESTED TO ATTEND
MEETING ID: 168 223 701
CLICK HERE
To call in without a computer or smart device, dial (669) 900-6833 and enter the Meeting ID.
Step Up to Leadership
As we slowly emerge from lockdown, consider stepping up to leadership in our beloved community! The Leadership Succession Committee is always ready to help new volunteer leaders find a place within the congregation’s Standing Committees. As a volunteer leader, you’ll meet new UUs, learn about how the church functions, and be a part of its leading edge.
Contact LSC Chair Andrew Fearnside afearnside@gmail.com to learn more about available opportunities.

Board of Directors Update
I feel an increasing anxiousness to come out of our COVID isolation and be together. I can barely sit still. My friends who garden are doing better in this moment because they are used to that feeling and know—now is the time to plant seeds! Harvest parties are still way out in the future, there to look forward to. But now? That itching means dig in.
Our Socorro Branch is itching to resume in-person worship. As a small group, all vaccinated, this feels safe to them. Our UU Kids Camp also needs to decide and plan what to do this summer. The COVID Advisory Council weighed their requests carefully last month, remembering that, although we have many groups, we are one church, and we need rules that apply across the board to keep everyone—especially the most vulnerable among us—safe.
We are closely tracking several sets of metrics for health and safety, and are discussing what the right thresholds will be to signal that it is safe for in-person gatherings. We will move through four phases:
• First, small groups will be able to meet outside;
• Then, small groups will be able to meet inside;
• Next, large groups will be able to meet outside;
• Finally, large groups will be able to meet inside.
We will also need to develop policies for large-group meeting safety through COVID and beyond. There’s still much to think through.
The church staff is still in the process of getting vaccinated, which is yet another safety factor to consider in the timing of when to reopen our church campus. There will be many procedures for them to think through during this time after COVID-isolation, but while COVID is still in circulation—particularly as children younger than 12 will presumably not yet be vaccinated.
A recent article indicated that, during the pandemic, many people have lost trust in institutions to keep them safe. Too many people feel that the biggest threat in our lifetimes did not bring about the commensurate effort from our institutions to make the big moves that were needed. Sometimes even the small moves didn’t get made.
As Rev. Angela has often reminded us, this church is ourselves, and we are all responsible—individually and collectively—for keeping each other safe. Now is the time for much thoughtfulness, with much weighing of the potential risks and multiple needs with the overwhelming rush of desire for in-person connection. What you water grows. And what we want together is a healthy church community that meets everyone’s needs as best as we can.
May we be wise and diligent gardeners in this springtime of a new world.
- Mikaela Renz-Whitmore, President of the Congregation
From Our Director of Religious Education

“We will not know our own injustice if we cannot imagine justice. We will not be free if we do not imagine freedom. We cannot demand that anyone try to attain justice and freedom who has not had a chance to imagine them as attainable.”

-Ursula K. LeGuin

Greetings!

May’s theme is Story. Our ministers tell us stories in worship. We share stories with our children and youth in Religious Education settings. Even in our families, stories remind us of who we are, and what is important to us. As we examine this theme in RE, we will focus on the idea that stories tell us who we are—as UUs, as families, as anti-racists, as courageous people who are interconnected beings.

Who we are is very often the result of stories we tell ourselves. Did you make up that story? Does it make sense for you now? Did your family tell it to you, or was it a teacher?

What is the story of your family? “We are …”

What is the story of your life? “I am …”

What will people remember about your story? We want people to remember the thing that is most important to us, even if that’s just that we were always smiling. How do you want people to remember you? If you’re not sure what your true story is, try coming up with how you most want to be remembered. That may start to tell the story of your life to you.

Mia Noren
Director of Religious Education, Credentialed
Dre@uuabq.org

Volunteering

Our typical RE programming depends on many volunteers, but—while we are meeting virtually—our community is still ‘the curriculum.’ Now, more than ever, we want to show our children how a community shows up for each other. Classes are shorter and simpler, and I still need you. Please connect with me at dre@uuabq.org if you think you can help!

Zoom Meetings

Links to our meetings can be found on our Facebook page, in the Broadsheet, and on the RE Calendar on our website.

Make sure you register your family on our website and contact Alana Rodriguez at reasst@uuabq.org if there are changes to your information, especially email. This is the only way we have to contact you.

Can’t make your RE meeting?

Children, youth, and families can access RE learning anytime! Bitmoji Resource Rooms are available for Elementary and Youth. You can access them on our Facebook pages and on the church website. Click “Learn” from the banner on the front page of the website, then choose a room and start clicking!

Youth News

Story is a journey with many different routes. This month, we will focus on four of them: your personal story, evolution, the stories that mislead and imprison us, and stories of service and sacrifice. There is one throughline in all of these: The call to tell a new story! This is also the message of our faith: We have a choice.

This reminds me of that old theological debate for which some of our UU forebears gave their lives. All around them, people believed that God had predestined the big story of humanity, and our individual stories, too! Some of us were slotted for heaven and others for hell, and God had written the list in ink. Nothing any of us could do about it!

Our spiritual ancestors thought that was a bit harsh and decided to rewrite that extreme, fate-driven story. In Unitarian Universalism, freedom has a much bigger role. God is not so much the author of the story as she is the magical muse that needles and nags us to put our own unique stamp on the narratives before us. May brings the end of the year for us with Coming of Age, Bridging, graduation activities, or moving to a new grade. There’s no better time to celebrate this call to make your mark and claim your storyline. May our youth lead the way and remind us all that it’s never too late for anyone to spin a new storyline!

Alana Rodriguez
Youth Programs Coordinator, RE Assistant
youth@uuabq.org
**Green Corner with Earth Web**
Because we live in a desert, New Mexicans are used to thinking about conserving water; and this practice also conserves the energy it takes to clean and transport water and to heat it if need be. [Project Drawdown](https://www.drawdown.org/) rates water saving at home as Solution #46 for addressing climate change, potentially reducing CO2 emissions by 4.6 gigatons. Low-flush toilets, water-efficient washing machines, and low-flow faucets and showerheads are one-time upgrades that make a huge difference! You can also take short showers, wash only full loads of clothes, capture rainwater, and use low-water plants in your yard. **There is a tight link between energy and water; reducing water use is a double win.**

**May 2: Welcoming the Stranger—ABQ FaithWorks**
How is First Unitarian involved with ABQ FaithWorks? How are we helping meet the needs of the ‘un-homed’ in our city? Will families from Central America seeking asylum be coming to Albuquerque this spring? How can we help welcome asylum seekers? Jessica Corley, Guest Speaker

**May 9: Fate and Freedom; Predestination and Agency**
How do we write our stories—or do our stories determine who we are? What is your current storyline? The role of faith and religion in crafting those stories. Angela Merkert, facilitator

**May 16: Whose Jesus Is It Anyway?**
This 2019 sermon by Rev. Bob contrasted “the Jesus who died for our sins...with the Jesus who comforted the poor and oppressed.” In this final class on Jesus, we’ll discuss some of the sermon as well as the main points of the Borg book’s final chapters. Unnecessary to have attended parts 1 and 2. Ron Friederich, facilitator

**May 23: Stories that Have Shaped the World**
How myths and stories influence our perspectives and our lives. What happens if we change the stories? A proverb says, “Those who tell the stories, rule the world.” Angela Merkert, facilitator

**May 30: Commemoration of Memorial Day**
The history of this day, the origins of Decoration Day. How shall we honor the day this year? What gives Memorial Day meaning in 2021 in this pandemic time? Angela Merkert, facilitator

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**Connect & Learn**

**Sunday Explorations**
Join us every Sunday morning at 9:30 for weekly discussions on a variety of social justice, UU history, and faith-based and spiritual topics. Bring your coffee or tea and be a part of this virtual group.

**Meeting ID:** 842 4289 2753  
**Passcode:** 041625

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**Are You New to First U?**
We have found one of the best ways to feel truly connected to our community is to join a small discussion group, so **New to First U Connections** is just for you! We meet once a month on the **first Tuesday** at **7:00 pm**, with our next meeting **May 4**. Meeting ID: 823 9345 8787 /Passcode: 681977
Wisdom Circle: Nature
Saturday, May 15, 10:30 am - Noon
As we emerge into the full glory of spring, we who’ve circled around the sun for many moons will re-gather around our virtual table to talk about our Mother Earth and what she means to us. What gifts does she bestow? What challenges does she present? In other words, in our interactions with the natural world, what do we discover about ourselves and our human reality? Come prepared to share your own personal experiences of nature and to reflect on its place in your life. All welcome. If the spirit so moves, bring along a drink to sip and something to nibble on. To allow time for sharing in both small groups and our larger circle, please note that the meeting will start at 10am. Contact Jerilyn Bowen at jbowen1@unm.edu.

Meeting ID: 962 2094 2211
Password: 485006

CUUPS This Month
You are invited to join Coyote Willow Covenant of UU Pagans on Saturday, May 1 at 5:00 pm for a Beltane Ritual to celebrate the height of spring and the flowering of life. Sprouts and seedlings are appearing, grass is growing, and the forests are alive with new life. Our Ritual will embrace this magical time of transformation. Participants are invited to have a piece of paper (printer paper/origami paper); scissors; a pen or pencil; or, a journal can be used to draw or write about your experience. Participants may bring a candle or chalice and food and drink for cakes and ale and feasting afterwards.

CUUPS holds its meet-and-greet/business meeting/planning session virtually on the 2nd Friday of each month at 7:00 pm. For this month’s meeting on May 14, think back: Do you remember playing campfire games as kids? Telling stories and jokes to pass the time before internet? Dig up your favorite memories and bring them with you. Let’s have some fun for our May meeting! Please have a candle and lighter ready for the start of the meeting.

Email Victoria Rosquist at bboydbabe@gmail.com for login information for these events.

Join Us for Another Landscape Day
Saturday, May 15, 9:00 am – Noon
Thanks to the energetic group of church members who joined us on April 3 for a successful morning of sprucing up the church courtyard. It was wonderful greeting each other after many months of a very quiet campus. Several more hours are necessary to complete the job. So, please join the Landscape Committee for a final spring greet and work session. Again, we ask that you wear a mask and maintain distance to reduce the possibility of transmitting the virus. Trash bags will be provided, but bring your own tools, gloves, and refreshments. Be a part of preparing the campus for that glorious day when we will all be welcomed back. Please let Steve Phillips know you will be attending at nmsleep@unm.edu.

Bread, Wine, and Book Club will meet Friday, May 14 at 7:00 pm on Zoom. This month’s book is Have You Seen Luis Velez? by Catherine Ryan Hyde. Contact Martha Beyerlein at martha.beyerlein@comcast.net for the meeting information.

The Monday Afternoon Book Club will meet Monday, May 17 at 1:30 pm on Zoom. The book is Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet by Jamie Ford. Please contact Joyce Etheridge at 509-308-5523 for further information.

Reading on Racism Book Group’s selection for May is The Night Watchman by Louise Erdrich. Our meeting is May 26, 3:00-5:00 pm. To join us and receive the Zoom link, please contact Kent Madden at revmadden22@gmail.com.

The Nonfiction Book Group meets every Wednesday at 1:00 pm on Zoom. For the latest book and meeting information, contact Bob Wood at roberttwood@gmail.com.
There’s More!
Our campus is still closed, and our meetings are virtual, but your church community is still here!
There are many opportunities to connect and get involved virtually.
Go to [http://uuabq.com/virtual-connections/](http://uuabq.com/virtual-connections/) to find out more, or email our Director of Membership & Communications, Laira Magnusson, at [LMags@uuabq.org](mailto:LMags@uuabq.org).