



EUU Welcomes New RE Director Julianne McCall



Julianne with EUU kids from the last retreat.

It is an utmost honor to join the EUU Religious Education Committee and prepare to step into the role of Director in November. I look forward to contributing some ideas, activities, and lessons to fill the years ahead with inspiration and growth in every possible way. I officially became a UU only four years ago, but my perspective of the world has been that of a UU my entire life. When I was a kid, my family attended the nearby Lutheran church, but I was the child in Sunday school who was challenging the lessons with questions of evolution and other cultural traditions. While a student at Denison University, I learned more about religion than expected when I accidentally became involved with Campus Crusade for Christ, an evangelical Christian organization (but that's a hilarious story for another time).

Still, I could never agree with the statements that limited "the truth" to one definition, especially one that resisted scientific evidence. When I lived in Sweden for a year after university on a Fulbright Research grant, it was wonderfully refreshing to live among a secular, liberal people, celebrating the holidays for no other reason than to share some happiness among friends and neighbors. But the environment lacked a sense of community and introspection that I had experienced once while attending a UU service with a college friend. So, when I moved back to the States to start a PhD program in Neurosciences at the University

of California, San Diego, the first thing that I did was find a UU congregation.

And I was blessed beyond belief with a collection of individuals that embodied the essence of a thoughtful, open-minded, and emphatically proactive community. Like a dream that keeps you smiling even after you wake up, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Dieguito provided mentors, friends, and family that will continue to serve as my foundation of hope and optimism when I most need a steady boost to continue striving for progress. By chance, I began helping with the teen RE program immediately and was hooked on the enjoyment of learning through teaching. Like the children and youth I have found here in the EUU, those in San Diego were motivated to make the world better, even at such a young age. I found that more inspiring than anything!

Attending such large events as Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in 2010 and West Coast Young Adult Retreat at de Benneville Pines in 2009 made me fully appreciate the value of growing up in the UU tradition. I have met many people my age who are members of these large groups of young adults that, when together, could easily be mistaken for close family members. Traditions abound with songs, games, and stories, and the environment among them is always cheerful and timeless. This is what I envision for the youth of the EUU: an embracing community that gathers to participate actively in the celebratory growth and embracing support of the group.

Apart from engaging in the UU network, my other interests take me on the greatest of adventures. At the moment, I am coordinating neuroscience outreach programs for several parts of Germany, along with organizing an international neuroscience competition, the Brain Bee, both for students aged 14-18. When my mind is not focused on developing classroom experiments, I can be found reading through articles as the Editor of the German Fulbright Alumni Association's annual publication. In San Diego, I was the Science Ambassador of **Autism Speaks**, an organization that supports individuals and families dealing with the developmental disorder. As well, I was an active member of **Surfrider Foundation**, an environmental group that worked daily to reverse the pollution of water sources and advocate for more mindful uses of natural resources. When I am not at my computer, I thoroughly enjoy playing sports, backpacking, and nearly any activity with good friends. Of course, I could not be a graduate student without spending plenty of hours at my lab bench, conducting experiments to stimulate adult nerve regeneration with a gene therapy

approach. Decades from now, the goal of my research is to contribute to therapies that will help paralyzed patients regain functions as simple as writing or walking.

As a member of the RE Committee, I am eager to help foster a sense of wonder, appreciation, and stewardship for the world and cultures we live in. Teaching religious understanding, in my opinion, is not far from teaching about the neurological connections that make up our thoughts. Realizing that we and others are capable of such amazing talents and ideas is empowering on many levels, whether in a religious setting, pondering history, traditions, and spirituality, or a neurological setting, associating our perceptions with the quadrillion biological processes that make up who we are and who we choose to become. My favorite lessons are those that change the way youth perceive the world around them—being a part of that is truly a precious gift for any teacher. After all, "We see things not as they are, but as we are"

Anais Nin

Please Join us at the Upcoming Fall Retreat in Oberwesel

Exploring our Place on Earth

For the Fall Retreat, where the general theme will be 'A Sense of Place,' the children and youth planning to participate in the RE program are in for a thrilling experience of discovering the greatness of our home planet through outdoor adventures, earth justice activities, popcorn popping, stargazing challenges and plenty of original UU games and songs.

In line with the cycle of Retreat RE subjects, we will be focusing our attention on nature-centered spirituality with the help of Native American storytelling traditions described in the beautiful book **Keepers of the Earth**, written by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac, and organized for a UU curriculum by Dawn Star Borchelt.

We can find a foundation for our ambitious leap into all things organic and wild, in Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was a Unitarian Minister in the 1800s who realized that all world religions were essentially based on similar inspirations from natural surroundings and human perceptions of the great mystery of the universe. Even with

so many scientific advances today, we still marvel at the changing skies and admire the force of massive ocean waves. Before the internet, weather forecasts, or microscopes, Native Americans developed stories for more than 12,000 years to explain the phenomena they witnessed every day and every year.

Their tales reflect our shared, timeless feelings of amazement in such creative and imaginative ways that each chapter of the book will open many possibilities for discussion. We will be exploring what makes our world such a special place with questions and exercises about our connection to other living beings and the importance of thinking about our environment.

The RE team includes all-time favorite teachers Karen Kyker, Janie Spencer-Bellet, Vicki-Jane Roberts-Gassler, and Jeanette Wild-Sievers. I will also have the pleasure of continuing as a teacher, and I look forward to seeing everyone from the Spring Retreat along with many new faces as well!

The date of the Retreat is perfectly relevant to our theme of nature and place with the American celebration of Thanksgiving only a couple weeks later, commemorating the significant event in 1621 when Native Americans helped European Settlers to grow food and survive in their new home, the United States before it was a country.

Throughout the lessons and activities, we will be reminded of the values of caring for our neighbors, whether they are the kids next door that also attend your school or the rabbits that live in the burrows beneath your backyard trees.

Several tasks will highlight the responsibility we have as thoughtful human beings in ensuring that our environment is healthy and not badly affected by our own actions. And, of course, we will create a feast in honor of our quest to make the world a better place for all! We hope you can join us!

Julianne McCall,
Fall Retreat RE Coordinator