



**The Unitarian Universalist
Community Church of Santa Monica**

September 22, 2011

Dear 3rd-5th grade Parents/Guardians:

We have just launched our new program year, and this year our congregation's Religious Exploration program is offering an exciting new program for **3rd-5th graders during the 11:00 service**. Called ***The UUniverse Story***, this curriculum will engage young people in exploring the mystery and wonder of the natural world around us, from the very, very big (cosmology) to the very, very small (biology). From the very beginnings of civilization, humans have sought to make meaning out of the questions of who we are, where we come from, and what our purpose is. All meaning stories, origin stories or creation myths, regardless of time or setting, have been a reflection of all the knowledge and technology available to its particular culture. This new class, developed by UUCSM members Ian Dodd and Margot Page, is designed to celebrate what we know in the 21st century and to nurture a sense of awe and wonder for the world around us through an interactive, science-based curriculum intended to foster an appreciation of the incredible achievements of our species in understanding the world and our place in it.

Over a two-year cycle, children will explore the Big Bang and the origins of the Universe, the chemistry of life, the ideas of evolution and change over time, and the interconnectedness of all people from our shared ancestry with each other and every other life form on the planet. The goal is to give the kids a modern creation story they can embrace and which will give them a grounding as they ponder questions of existence and meaning. Moreover, by asking: "How do we know what we know?", the intent is to offer not only understanding of the world, but an appreciation for Albert Einstein's oft-quoted paradox, "The most incomprehensible thing about the Universe is that it is comprehensible."

The following are a few important administrative items about the structure of our year.

- **Please pick your child up from RE promptly at 12:15.** Children through Grade 5 must be picked up from class by their parents. Class time lasts until 15 minutes after the hour in order to allow for a full hour of class, and so parents have time to grab a cup of coffee before coming to collect their children. Please be prompt; RE teachers deserve to take part in coffee hour, too! Parents, please remember that you are responsible for your children at all times when they are not in class. Even though our church is a safe and loving place, it is not a good idea for children to roam the grounds without their parents. Staff and volunteers are not responsible for supervising children when they are not in RE classes or official childcare.
- **All families participating in RE must complete a registration form for each of their children.** These forms are crucial because they include emergency contact information, space to share any special needs or allergies child may have and other important information to help us get to know your child. If you have not already turned in a registration form, one is included in this mailing. Please complete it and bring it on Sunday.
- **The UUCSM RE UUpdates email is sent weekly** to provide updates about what will happen in class this week, a calendar and announcements for upcoming events, at-home suggestions for engaging with the themes we're exploring this year, and more. This is a primary means of communication with all of our RE families - if you are not receiving this email, contact me right away so we can get you on the list.

- **Parent participation required:** Your help is vital to the success of our RE program. All parents are asked to contribute some of their time to our RE program this year. There are many different ways to be involved, which require varying levels of commitment. **Please fill out the volunteer commitment form which is attached to your child's registration form.**
- **Snack Signup request coming soon:** We would like to ask parents to sign up to bring a modest snack for their child's class this year, taking the burden off of the shoulders of the volunteer teachers who already do so very much for our program. You will be contacted soon with a request to sign up for a few Sundays during the year. Information about any food allergies as well as suggested snack items will be provided. Sharing food together is part of what binds us together as a caring community of faith, and our kids take snack time VERY seriously! Please help us keep our tradition of providing in-class snacks going.
- **Children/Youth Choir:** Does your child like to sing? Seth Houston, our new music director, is starting an occasional children's/youth choir that will perform a few times a year during Intergenerational Services. Rehearsals will be from 9-9:15 on Sundays (meet in the cottage rather than going to the sanctuary for the first part of the service) for a few weeks leading up to the performances. Contact Catherine@uusm.org if your child or youth is interested in participating. **The first rehearsal is THIS WEEK - Sunday, September 25th!** The choir will also rehearse on 10/16 and 10/23 for performance in service on 10/30, as well as 11/13 for performance in service on 11/20. It is an incredible opportunity for young people in our church to participate in the music program, with guidance from our Music Director. Please arrive by 8:50 so the group can be ready to start at 9:00 sharp – fifteen minutes isn't very long to rehearse! ***I know this plan is not ideal for 11:00 families, but Seth is in the service with the adult choir during the second service and so cannot work with the children at that time. If your child would like to participate, consider coming at 9:00 for the four rehearsal Sundays only. We hope to have children's music opportunities at additional times later in the year as well.***
- **Children's Chapel on 1st Sundays beginning in November.** On the first Sunday of each month, starting in November, we're trying something new: rather than attending the first part of the service in the sanctuary, all children will gather promptly at 9:00 under the shade structure behind the cottage for a 15-minute children's chapel service. Children will then go to their classes as usual. We'll post a reminder in front of the church on those Sundays.
- **Intergenerational services:** Throughout the year, we will have occasional Intergenerational services in which the children and youth are in the sanctuary for the entire service. These services help us celebrate being together as one UUCSSM community of all ages, and also provide an important opportunity for young people to experience first-hand the way their parents worship in the sanctuary when they would usually be in their classrooms.

Please return the registration form as quickly as possible. It can be turned in to my box in the main office, or at the Lifespan RE table in Forbes Hall during coffee hour on Sundays. As always, please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Thank you for your involvement; thank you for recognizing the need for religious education in your children and youth's lives...thank you for adding your presence to this community. We are thrilled to have your family among us and look forward to an exciting year together!

See you in church,

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