

DIALOGUE

Inspired by our UU principles, we are a vibrant, intentionally diverse congregation that models and promotes both locally and globally: love, spiritual growth, service, right relations and sustainable living.



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**Celebrating the 20th Anniversary
of
Casas de Luz**
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Rev. Heather's Corner



Happy New Year! I enter this year of spiritual fellowship with gratitude for the wisdom I gained during this past year of transition. After months of settling in (both physically and mentally), I am eager and excited to enter this calendar year with hope and inspired momentum.

The fall was spent building foundations for our new staff, facilities, and governance structure, including the development of the Leadership Council, which replaces our previous system of Board liaisons. All our programs and committees are organized into teams with representatives who attend Leadership Council meetings that report on what is happening within the different groups here at the fellowship. That information is then consolidated into a report for the Board and distributed out to the congregation to aid in communication and a sense of shared vision and understanding of the many

moving parts in our community. In the next few months, you will hear more about the Leadership Council and how it can help foster connection among our many programs.

Our fellowship is also experiencing many other exciting developments, including:

1. **A return to using all our newly renovated campus spaces.** On January 25th, we will celebrate the reopening of our administration building (including new Conference and Programs Rooms), the Palmer library, the amphitheater, and our newly developed parking lot and pathways. Our staff has been working hard to ensure our shared spaces are ready for meetings, events, and spiritual gatherings. We are excited to see our campus spaces alive and functioning again!
2. **The presence of SDIMA on our campus.** UUFSD will begin hosting the San Dieguito Interfaith Ministerial Association's (SDIMA's) meetings and events starting in January. This includes their monthly "Dialogue" meetings, in which different faith perspectives are shared by local religious leaders, and special events. I will be sharing the fundamentals of Unitarian Universalism at the meeting on February 4th (12pm in Founders Hall). All are welcome to join us and learn more about the active faiths in our community.
3. **Adult RE.** Join me in a Spiritual Autobiography Writing Workshop beginning January 14th and running every Wednesday evening (6:30-8pm) through February 18th on Zoom. We will explore our own past, present, and future spiritual journeys through writings, exercises, and sharing. All are welcome to attend and participate. Please email me at heather@uufsd.org to sign up and receive the Zoom link.
4. **A new website!** We are working hard to upgrade our website to a sleeker, more digestible, and easier to navigate site with a Member's Only section that will include Board minutes, Leadership Council reports, recordings of recent services, and program and committee information. Stay tuned!

As the light returns to us this winter, may we also look toward the future with optimism and hope. There is so much for us to look forward to here in our blessed community. Ever onward, ever upward. Together.

With love and care,
Rev. Heather

Religious Exploration & Fellowship



Emily Host, Director of Religious Exploration and Fellowship

A Season of Exploration and New Beginnings

I am excited to share my first update with the congregation since joining our staff in October 2025. This season has been rich with opportunities for religious exploration, joyful community connection, and renewed energy for the months ahead.

That joyful community was on full display at our recent holiday party, which was a resounding success. Friends old and new gathered to share food, laughter, music, and conversation, reminding us of the importance of joy and fellowship in our spiritual lives. Events like these are more than celebrations; they are expressions of our values,

strengthening the bonds that sustain us through both ordinary and extraordinary times. Many thanks to the volunteers who made the evening so welcoming and festive, particularly our choir members for their carol singing.

Our Sunday school classes continue to thrive as well. Each week, children and youth engage in age-appropriate exploration of UU values. Through stories, discussion, art, and play, they are learning not only about the world around them, but also about their own capacity for compassion and courage. Our youth group has taken on kitchen service on the second Sunday of each month as a way to find tangible purpose and multigenerational connection. As we look ahead into 2026, we will work toward the inclusion of Our Wholes Lives (OWL) and Coming of Age opportunities.

May we continue to embrace curiosity, welcome new voices, and celebrate the many ways we learn and grow as a community. Whether through classes, gatherings, or quiet reflection, our shared journey of exploration continues—and everyone is invited to take part.



20th Anniversary of Casas de Luz



A Tribute to Kathy Faller

Casas de Luz: a name that has become so familiar to dozens across San Diego County, yet one that began with a simple desire to do more. On a Saturday morning in 2005, Kathy Faller left her home in Solana Beach and drove just over an hour south, arriving at a newly poured concrete foundation in Tijuana. Over the next two days, she witnessed something extraordinary: the power of a small group of volunteers, determined to bring light and dignity into the life of one family. When she returned home, she was changed forever. One simple phrase sealed her future.

“You can do this yourself.” - Gersom Ayala

Those words echoed in Kathy's heart as she stood in a dark room during an interview with a potential family. The space was fragile, held together by scrap wood and old garage doors. Thin cracks allowed slivers of light to slip inside, but for the most part, this family lived in darkness. In that moment, Kathy's calling was solidified: she would bring light into these homes—literally through large windows and figuratively through relationships rooted in hope. From this vision, Casas de Luz, or “Homes of Light,” was born.

Kathy went to Rev. Kathy Hurt at UUFSD and asked if she thought that UUFSD would be interested in building homes. With seed money from the Minister's fund the first home was built. UUFSD has continued to support Casas de Luz through home builds and Generosity Sunday financial contributions every year over the past 20 years.

In its earliest years, Casas de Luz (CDL) built just one or two homes annually as Kathy slowly built her network in Tijuana. Yet her passion was contagious. Every person she encountered, whether on a home build or in her community at home, felt her fierce love for others. Word spread across San Diego, and soon more groups were crossing the border to join the mission. Volunteers returned not only with stories of construction, but of transformation as they discovered how a single home could change an entire family's future.

From the very beginning, Kathy sought ways to expand the mission beyond walls and roofs. On one early build, she met a family deeply committed to serving their community. Together, they launched what became known as the “breakfast club,” ensuring dozens of children started their school days nourished and ready to learn. In 2013, CDL built its first community center for that same family—a space that became a second home for dozens. Here, families found meals, homework support, celebrations, and, most importantly, a place of safety and belonging.

Meanwhile, the high school internship program flourished, empowering young people in San Diego to grow as leaders while serving alongside families in Tijuana. In 2015, Casas de Luz celebrated its 10th anniversary with a record 10 homes built in a single year. The following year marked another breakthrough, as the first all-women's team raised the walls and roof of a home. Two years later, in 2018, another all-women's team built for a family of three women. One of them, who once studied under the faint glow of a single lamp in a cramped, one-room house, went on to become a doctor, dedicating her life to serving others.



20th Anniversary of Casas de Luz

Stories like hers are not exceptions, they are the very heart of Casas de Luz. Each home is more than a shelter, it is a foundation for transformation and hope. This spirit fueled the opening of Faro de Luz in 2018, a community center supported by Casas de Luz. Today, it serves as a center for children and adult education programs, a dormitory for volunteers during builds, and a beacon of stability and hope in a neighborhood that once felt forgotten.

Now in 2025, Casas de Luz celebrates its 20th anniversary and its 200th home. In two decades, the organization has grown from a single dream into a movement powered entirely by volunteers from across San Diego and beyond.

At the heart of this story is one woman: Kathy Fallor. Her vision, her relentless belief in others, and her fierce love for humanity have guided every step of Casas de Luz's journey. Kathy has taught us that every person, whether a single mother receiving a home or a teenager on their first build, carries immense potential. Casas de Luz is not just about building homes; it is about building futures, strengthening communities, and reminding us all of our shared humanity.

As we celebrate 20 years of light, we celebrate Kathy's legacy and the community she has nurtured on both sides of the border. Together, we honor the countless families whose lives have been transformed, the volunteers who discovered purpose in service, and the belief that together, we can build a brighter future for all.

Casas De Luz is starting the next chapter in its third decade. 2026 is going to be a transition year of merging our activities with another non-profit, DOXAserves.org We share a similar commitment to the families in Mexico and the thousands of volunteers who have supported our activities. More to be announced in the coming year.



Religious Exploration & Fellowship Casas de Luz Home Build



Building Hope in Mexico



Religious Education- Casas de Luz Home Build

In October, a dedicated group from our fellowship traveled to Mexico to help build a home for a family in need—an experience that reminded everyone of the call to serve with open hands and open hearts. Kathy Faller and the Casas de Luz team lead the group in an unforgettable process that showed us all how a simple structure can become a symbol of hope, stability, and love. Four families from our congregation brought their youth to participate, including Reverend Heather’s two children. It was a first time experience for all of the young people to participate in service rooted in relationships. Two of our former youth group participants joined the team, bringing energy, compassion, and a willingness to lead as they worked alongside local builders and volunteers. Their enthusiasm was a source of inspiration throughout the build. We were hosted by the incredible team at the local community center for food and housing. Their impact on their neighbors is deeply felt in the smiles and generosity of the many volunteers present. We departed the build after the key ceremony with a spirit of unity and purpose. We give thanks for safe travels, willing hearts, and the chance to make a lasting difference. What an exciting, humbling, and fulfilling experience! Many thanks to Kathy Faller, whose unceasing energy and care for others is an inspiration to us all. Let’s make this a yearly event!!

Our Values in Action

The plastic bin and black trash bags are stuffed full of those members and friends donated and the ones Betsy Gilpin purchased from monetary donations.

The Community Resource Center was thrilled to get them as some of the other organizations that were to donate blankets didn't meet their goal. **Our goal was to match the 32 that Norma Showalter donated on our behalf last year.** We collected 58 blankets.

We think that our previous program coordinator, Norma Showalter, who tragically passed away recently, would be very pleased with our success in exceeding our goal.

Many thanks to those who participated in this effort. There will be a lot of seniors enjoying the warmth these blankets will provide. **A special thanks to Betsy Gilpin who stepped up and coordinated this year’s Holiday Baskets.**

Do you know what 58 lap blankets look like? Well, this is what they look like.



Our Values in Action



Somos Tias members Kathy Stanger, Lisa Montes, Ana Escamila Lang, youth volunteers Laura Kirwan and Sydney Manger and UUFSD volunteers, Donna Gernhauser, Robin Sales, Liz Young and Mary Ann Trause.



UUFSD was formally introduced to **Somos TIAS**, meaning both “Take Inspired Action Siempre” and “We are Aunties,” at a Sunday service on November 9, 2025. TIAS is a group of neighbors dedicated to extending care and support to the vulnerable and at-risk in our communities. Three members of TIAS shared their moving personal stories. Two were among the founding group of neighbors who came together in January 2025 in response to the fear and trauma caused by the immigration raids. They stated, "the blatant disregard for our rights and laws, and the targeting of our neighbors simply because of the color of their skin or the

language they speak, has no place in our communities." So TIAS was born. Its mission is to build stronger, safer, and more inclusive communities by providing those in need with what they need, when they need it. It takes a village to do this work.

The TIAS message in the service was amplified by Peggy Watson and David Beldock, singer-songwriters, who performed their powerful composition, *We Are Not Criminals*, which can be accessed on YouTube. The service ended with the uplifting comments of two eighth-graders who volunteer with TIAS and told how working with this group gives them hope for their own futures and the future of our country.

TIAS values are closely aligned with ours. If you'd like to get more information about how you can volunteer, contact Donna Gerhauser at TIAS@uufsd.org. To donate money online, go to Breeze and click on the Give Tias button under Giving.

Our Values in Action



UU The Vote Group Phone Bank

The UU the Vote Group participated in the effort to get votes out in the State of Virginia. This was the first major referendum on democracy in 2025, and GOTV worked tirelessly to mobilize Black voters. Virginians will be electing a new governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, and state delegates, leaders who will decide the state's future and set the stage for 2026. Actions included phone banking together with Center for Common Ground (in partnership with UUA).

This past year, 420 letters were sent. Efforts will crank up next year, with the focus on Georgia. The UUA has a phone banking system that includes a training program, and will begin service for the mid term elections. Our mailing lists are typically provided by Vote Forward. For more information on the UU The Vote Group, contact Ted Foster at uuthevotegroup@uufsd.org

UUFSD Palestine-Israel Justice Group



From October through December 2025 the Palestine-Israel Justice Group (PIJG) published "PALESTINE-ISRAEL FACTS" in our newsletter and website. This "Facts" column provided additional information in the PIJG's call for a congregational vote on the Apartheid Free Congregation Pledge, which will take place at the January Congregational Meeting.

**AN ACTION OF IMMEDIATE WITNESS SPONSORED BY THE
AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE**

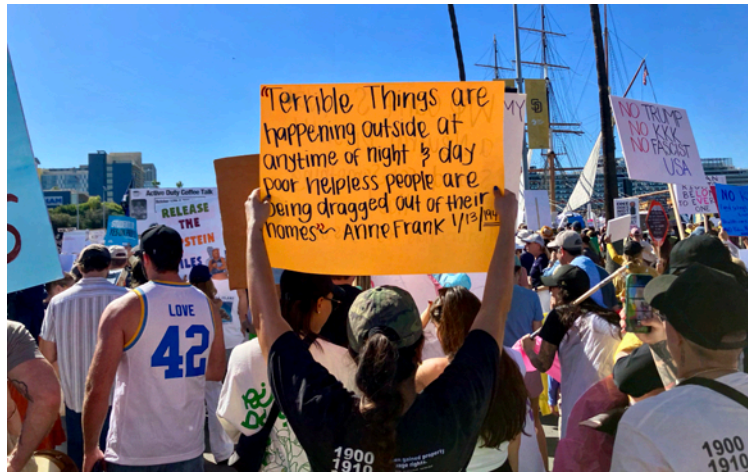
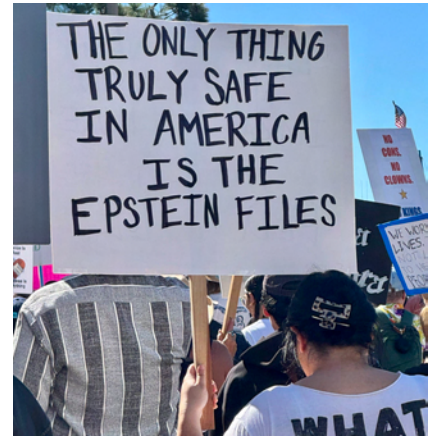
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Diego Apartheid Free Pledge

**We Affirm our commitment to freedom, justice, and equality for the Palestinian people and all people;
We Oppose all forms of racism, bigotry, discrimination, and oppression; and
We Declare ourselves and apartheid-free community, and to that end,
We Pledge to join others in working to end all support to Israel's apartheid regime, settler colonialism, and military occupation.**

Our Values in Action

No Kings March, Saturday, October 18

Signs Of Our Time



Social Justice From the Comfort of Your Home Can You Spare 10 Minutes a Week?

Every week the Social Justice Action Committee publishes a list of various justice actions that members and friends can take from the comfort of their homes. These are listed in the weekly newsletter "Under the Umbrella." There are messages to Congressmen, Senators, local and State officials on a variety of issues. We ask you to add your name to at least one, that resonates with you.

Our Values in Action

Freedom To Live Vigil - Sunday December 14

It's unacceptable that gun violence is the number one cause of death for children and teens in America—yet so many of our leaders are still putting the gun lobby's interests first.

UUFSD held a candlelight vigil to commemorate the anniversary of the 2013 Sandy Hook elementary school shooting and honor the over 500,000 people who have been killed by guns since the tragedy. This brief service was part of the #FreedomToLive and National Mobilization Days to #EndGunViolence and included music, readings, and silent meditation.



GET INVOLVED!

We are looking for a GVP Coordinator

Contact:

gvp@uufsd.org

Gun Violence Archive
Total January-November 2025
Mass Shootings (4 or more casualties): 380
321 dead 1788 injured

Murders/Homicides/Unintentional	13,476	
Total Number of Injuries	24,403	
Mass Murders	15	
Number of Children (ages 0-11)	206 dead	440 injured
Number of teens (ages 12-17)	928 dead	2544 injured
Unintentional Shootings: 1204		
Murder/Suicides: 617		

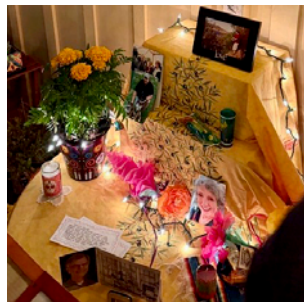
More information at gvp@uufsd.org

Happenings

SOUTHIES AT UUFSD



The idea of a Southies social group came out of a number of conversations over a number of months among a number of people, all with home addresses in the City of San Diego. There was a sense that we didn't know who else lived in this area, and wouldn't it be wonderful to know who we are? We wanted to create a focus for community that would be more accessible to those of us who live south of the Fellowship, so southies@uufsd.org was born. The creation of this neighborhood community provides us with the means to socialize together, to attend local events and activities together, and to provide community care for each other.



Our most recent event was a November 1 *Dia de los Muertos* celebration at the Kowalski's residence. Attendees included Karen and Mike Kowalski, Greg and Christine Trigeiro, Gene and Denise Peters, Greg Brown, Karen Eckhart, Nick Sowko, Cindy Anderson, Scott Thacher, Guliz Kuruoglu, Anne Clarkin and her husband Rich, Linda Kavanagh, Kathryn Sturch, and Kevin and Sarah Miller.

The Southies group started with people who live in the City of San Diego, but is open to all members and friends of UUFSD. To be in on the fun, contact office@uufsd.org and we'll get you on the southies@uufsd.org mailing list.

Flowers at UUFSD



We are grateful to the Encinitas Trader Joes store for donating flowers to the fellowship . On most Sundays, our members and visitors are treated to a variety of flowers for their personal pleasure. Many of us also take flowers for friends and family members who might be having health difficulties or hard times, to brighten their days. The flowers are in the core area and we welcome everyone to enjoy them.

A special thanks to Livia Walsh, & Irv Himelblau for coordinating this program and to Chris and Kay Byrnes, Ron Demuth and Steve Bartram for bringing the flowers to the fellowship every week.

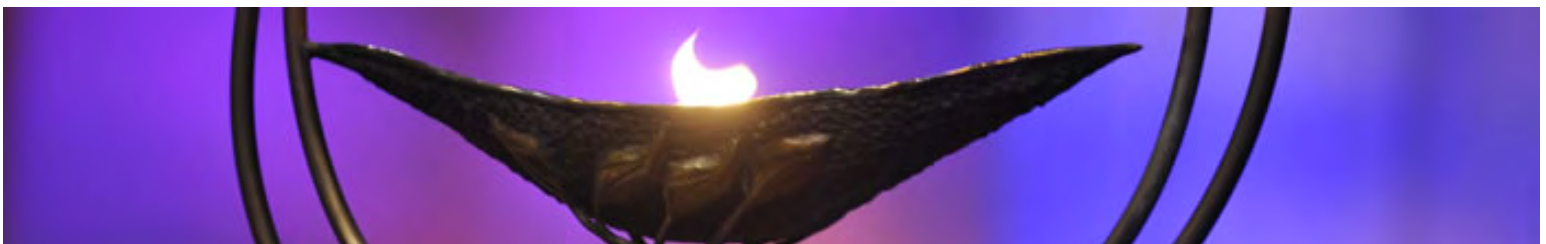


Happenings

Thanksgiving Dinner Thursday, Nov 27



As with many of the first settlers and the Wampanoag Indians on that first Thanksgiving, UUFSD celebrated a day of gratitude with old and new members and visitors. Two golden brown roasted turkeys and a succulent ham were shared with all the trimmings brought by the 70 or more members and visitors. The feast was a wonderful sunny filled day as stories were shared and food was enjoyed. **Thank you to Louise Garrett for her devotion to making this annual holiday feast a true celebration of gratitude and friendship.**



Welcome New Members



Gitta Pazar has been a Unitarian Universalist for a long time. She says, “ I own a small business IT consulting firm so I expect to be involved with tech issues at our beautiful church. In my spare time I enjoy being active -- camping, hiking, dancing, traveling and anything else.” Gitta is attracted to many activities at the Fellowship like Sacred Circles, the Buddhist Sangha, helping in our Fellowship Kitchen, Social Justice and Climate Action. She is already a part of the Women’s group and the Camping group. Welcome, Gitta!



Born in LA, **Vincent (Vinnie) Perez** is a bonafide native Los Angeleno. After a childhood spent partly in Guam, he returned to Southern Cal and attended college in San Diego where he met his wife Susan of 36 years. Together they have 2 grown sons, 1 daughter-in-law and a 5-year-old dog. He retired after practicing medicine for 32 years. Vince grew up Catholic and although not a practicing Catholic now, he continues trying to figure out what’s “important” in life, reflecting that “I needed something more, so I searched for a Unitarian church and was fortunate to find UUFSD.” Here at the Fellowship, Vince enjoys the sermons and he says, “I really enjoy the Time for All Ages.” Currently, he has an interest in Game Nights here, in ushering and in our site maintenance. Welcome, Vince!



Rusty Rodes has lived from coast to coast in America. Born in LA, he was raised in the Midwest and attended college on the East Coast. He moved to San Diego in 1990, and joined the County Parks service after the Cedar fire in 2004. He says, “I’ve lived my dream job as a Park Ranger for the past 20 years.” Rusty currently works at the San Elijo Lagoon Nature Center with his trusted canine companion Astro, and lives in our local San Dieguito Park. His job requires Rusty to work on Sundays so he won’t be able to attend UUFSD Services until he retires, but he’s glad to become a part of our community now. He came “seeking spiritual healing, Renewal and joy from current political unrest in our country.” A special joy in his life is that his son was married this fall. Rusty loves to sing, so you might find him at a (non-Sunday) singalong soon. He’s also interested in our Fun and Fellowship and Social Justice actions. Welcome Rusty!

Welcome New Members



Born in Alabama, **Gene Peters** moved to Michigan as a teenager and attended the University of Michigan, ending with an undergrad degree in Engineering and an MBA. While working as a business consultant, he tried Transcendental Meditation before finding and practicing Nichiren Buddhism with the Soka Gakkai steadily for 39 years. He says, “after a group of serendipitous experiences I was able to get a job as an engineer with the Navy which I just retired from after 38 years. I attribute my good fortune in getting the job to my practice of chanting “Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo” and studying Buddhism and helping other people to practice.” He has 2 grown children and is married to Denise MacNeil Peters. He enjoys working out, swimming, studying chess on Duolingo, and has an unbroken streak of five years on Lumosity. At the Fellowship, Gene enjoys our BrewPub and potlucks, although he finds them a bit too tempting for his waistline. He’s interested in our Buddhist Sangha group, in our work parties on our grounds, and in becoming a Greeter. Welcome Gene!

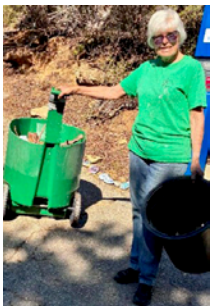


Born in Massachusetts, **Denise MacNeil Peters** says she felt from a young age that “I loved being alive.” She knew from the age of eight that she wanted to get a PhD, and got it in the end, as well as an MA and an MFA, after first being discouraged from it by a faculty advisor. She says, “I was always interested in the meaning of things. When I was in my early 20s I would wish that I were wise so that I could know better what it is that I should do in my life.” She has a grown son, two step-children and a grandchild. Denise enjoys exercising, reading and socializing and learning about health issues to stay healthy. She has enjoyed the BrewPub and the Southies potluck. At the Fellowship, Denise is interested in our Buddhist Sangha, in becoming a greeter, in our monthly Work Parties, and in Social Justice. Welcome, Denise!

All In A Days Work

From Ed Mlakar Building and Grounds coordinator, Site update:

On Tuesday, November 25, Jim Hagan, Chris Faller, Betsy Gilpin & Ed Mlakar were at the site. Betsy hauled numerous loads of plant debris to the dumpster, Ed sanded and varnished the worship tables while Jim & Chris dug up the roots on the footprints patio that are pushing up the brick pavers. Jim & Chris were also there Wednesday and Friday and finished the worst part of the pavers. There is still more to do. Everyone is welcome to join our work parties. Contact Ed Mlakar at buildingandgrounds@uufsd.org for more information on work dates.



Holiday Giving Tree 2025



This year the Social Justice Action group (SJA) sponsored the 6th annual Giving Tree project which raised \$1800 to provide three families a happy holiday. There are now 9 children, from three to 15 years, and two young moms with two 2 year old toddlers. We have been providing emotional and material support for over 7 years which started with a call from one of the Encinitas elementary schools.

The families continue to struggle financially from the effects of low earning potential due to their immigration status, rent increases, and inflation which has hit them hard. These are very hardworking parents who would not have been able to use whatever income they get to buy presents this year. Additionally, under assault by ICE and the

draconian immigration system, they live in constant fear, not knowing if they will be kidnapped while walking their children to school or going to work. We are fortunate to have the support of Somos TIAS this year which donated gifts for each family. We are so grateful to all of you for the ongoing support.

Fill a Belly

UUFSD Serving Dinner & Choir Members at Fill A Belly Dinner, Dec.18, 2025



What a wonderful UUFSD-Fill a Belly Xmas dinner. The food was abundant, and the music resonated throughout the patio. It is always an honor to be able to share a meal with our unhoused brothers and sisters, especially during the holiday season. We served over 60 people and there were left overs for people to take back with them.

