

A Sabbatical Guide

Dear Members and Friends,

Sarah Gonzalez became our Director of Religious Education in 2010. Over the the past six years Sarah has become a UUA Credentialed Religious Educator, has created an impressive RE program offering diverse classes for our children and youth, and has expanded Our Whole Lives courses to K-1, 4-5, while continuing the 7-9 courses. She has utilized UUA developed curriculum, and where she has identified gaps in available curricula, Sarah has researched, developed and implemented her own original curricula. Sarah ministers to our children and our congregation in youth-only and multigenerational services. As part of our commitment to supporting Sarah as a Religious Educator, we are granting her a one-month sabbatical. This sabbatical will be a time for Sarah to renew her spiritual, emotional and intellectual strength. We know that she will return from her sabbatical refreshed and re-energized. We are pleased to honor our commitment to Sarah, and we are confident her sabbatical from January 16 through February 15 will be rewarding for her and our church community.

This guide, prepared by the UUCSS DRE Sabbatical Committee, is a tool to help the church community embrace the challenges and opportunities that a sabbatical brings. The DRE Sabbatical Committee was created to ensure that UUCSS Religious Education program operates smoothly during Sarah's absence. Our aim is to assist you in whatever way we can.

Sarah's sabbatical is a time for a complete break from her duties as the director of RE. This guide explains how the RE program will operate during this period. The only people authorized to contact Sarah during her sabbatical are Rev. Liz Lerner Maclay and the UUCSS DRE Sabbatical Chair. Contact information for the Sabbatical Chair and others you may want to reach out to is included in this guide.

Miranda Bradley
Chair, DRE Sabbatical Committee

Sabbaticals, Religious Educators, and Sarah

A sabbatical is a period of special leave granted for professional development in a manner not possible during the press of activity in a typical work year. Sabbaticals are not vacations, but pathways to viewing vocations in new ways, through fresh eyes. Many people travel, experience different cultures, learn new skills. The goal of this activity is to return to the congregation renewed, refreshed. Many benefits are accrued by both the religious educator and the congregation from sabbatical leave. Religious educators make an intense commitment of time and energy to their congregations. This work schedule allows for little opportunity for the thoughtful enrichment, analysis, study and evaluation that sabbatical leave allows. The congregation has an opportunity for growth through the sharing of creative abilities in meeting the programming needs during the sabbatical and also benefits from the renewed enthusiasm of the Director upon their return.

As with ministers, guidelines for Religious Educators strongly recommend sabbatical agreements with their churches. Nearly all congregations within the Greater Washington area have sabbatical agreements with their religious educators. This is the first time in the history of UUCSS that a Religious Educator has had a sabbatical agreement with the congregation, and it is wonderful that the congregation is taking this step.

Sarah will be spending the first two weeks of her sabbatical time in Hawaii rejuvenating her spirit. She plans to spend time during the second half of her sabbatical working to publish one of the many curricula she has written in her six years at UUCSS, a multigenerational curriculum exploring Unitarian Universalist history and theology.

Celebrating Our Religious Educator's Sabbatical

Sarah will begin her sabbatical on Monday, January 16th. During the January 15th RE classes, Sarah will lead a special children's worship where she will ask the children and youth to bless her small travel chalice that she will take with her on her travels. She will return on Thursday, February 16th, and will lead a celebratory reunion children's worship on February 19th.

What Will Happen For Religious Education?

While Sarah is away, RE assistant Michael Knaapen, RE committee chair Gregg Harry, and the rest of the RE committee will be stepping up to provide support for the many volunteers who keep the RE program running from week to week. The RE program during Sarah's sabbatical is fully planned, programmed, and staffed. Here is what the time during Sarah's sabbatical month will look like:

January 15th – Sarah will lead Sabbatical send off children's worship

January 22nd – Age specific RE classes for all ages

January 29th – Age specific RE classes for 5th grade and under, YRUU led worship for middle school and older

February 5th – Age specific RE classes for all ages

February 12th – Kirtan multigenerational worship service for all ages

February 19th – Sarah returns and will lead Sabbatical reunion children's worship

Who Should I Contact?

If you have important business relating to the UUCSS Religious Education Program during Sarah's sabbatical, please get in touch with RE Assistant, Michael Knaapen. His email address is reassistant@uucss.org.

If you have pastoral care needs during Sarah's absence please get in touch with Rev. Liz. Her email address is minister@uucss.org or you can reach her office phone at 301-434-4050 ext. 112. You can also reach out to the lay ministry team at layministers@uucss.org.

If you have questions about the sabbatical process or plans, please contact the DRE Sabbatical Committee Chair, Miranda Bradley, at miranda@bradleyryder.org.

Message from Sarah Gonzalez, Credentialed Religious Educator

I am both very grateful for and sorely in need of my upcoming sabbatical time. It is clear to me why both the Liberal Religious Educators Association and the Unitarian Universalist Association recommend a sabbatical is given to all Religious Educators after five years of service. This job requires you to give your whole self day in and day out. It is a privilege to be able to give so much of my time and energy to this wonderful congregation, and now halfway through my sixth year as your Director of Religious Education I am feeling the need for some time for renewal. I deeply appreciate being given this time.

One of my favorite parts of being your DRE is having the opportunity to write curricula that best meets the needs of this particular religious community. Three years ago when starting the multigenerational RE class, I discovered no curricula existed covering UU theology that was written

for a multigenerational audience. I spent much of that summer and fall writing a curriculum that we used in the winter and spring of that year. However, given that I was operating on a very tight schedule, the curriculum isn't quite polished enough to distribute to other congregations or to add to our own official collection of curricula. One of the things I hope to accomplish while on this sabbatical is to edit and refine this curriculum so that UUCSS and other interested UU congregations can use this curriculum for years to come.

While this sabbatical will be an exciting and rejuvenating time for me, it will be hard to be away from all of you. I will miss you all during my time away and will be looking forward to my return when we will be together again. I will be lighting a chalice that was given to me as a gift from the RE committee each Sunday morning and thinking of you all and wishing you well when I do so.

I am thankful that we have such an incredible Religious Education Assistant this year in Michael Knaapen, and I am confident in his ability to keep things running smoothly while I am away. I also have a great deal of confidence in the fantastic members of the RE committee, my wonderful sabbatical committee, and our brilliant team of RE teachers and volunteers, as well as the presence, support, and wisdom of Rev. Liz. Just as I hope this sabbatical will be a valuable time of renewal for me, I hope it will be an empowering opportunity for the many people who support the UUCSS RE program to showcase their amazing gifts and skills. May this time be fruitful and meaningful for all of us.

With gratitude and love,
Sarah