

Prairie Fire

June 22, 2009

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The full-featured **Prairie Fire** is published on the 22nd of every month. The **Prairie Fire Bulletin** is a calendar-only newsletter that is published on the 6th of every month. Both are published by Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society. View past issues at www.uuprairie.org

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Calendar

Tuesday, June 23, 2009

2:00 pm - Prairie Elders meet at Oakwood. Topic is "Bailouts, Incentives, & Stimulus Plans."

Sunday, June 28, 2009

10:00 am - service - "Summer Reads," presented by Rose Smith.

Tuesday, June 30, 2009

6:30 pm - Spanish Speaker's Potluck at the home of Amy Schulz.

Sunday, July 5, 2009

10:00 am - service - "One's Heart is Enough," presented by Rev. Jane Esbesen.
11:45 am - Humanist union Meets for potluck, speaker Rev. Jane Esbesen 12:30.

Sunday, July 12, 2009

10:00 am - service - "Religions of the World," presenter TBA.
11:30 am - Prairie Board Meeting. Potluck lunch, then meeting begins at noon, with Ian Evison from CMwD.

Thursday, July 16, 2009

7:00 pm - Movie Group meets to view "How Green Was My Valley."

Sunday, July 19, 2009

10:00 am - service - "Tribal Connections to the Earth," presenter TBA.
11:45 am - Prairie Book Club meets.

Sunday, July 26, 2009

10:00 am - Joint UU Service at Sauk City.

Upcoming Sunday Programs

Sunday June 28, 2009 "Summer Reads," presented by Rose Smith. Every summer we have a program in which we all have an opportunity to tell each other about a book we've read and recommend that others might also enjoy. We write their names, titles and publishing information on index cards which are collected and the list is then printed in the Prairie Fire. Come join us for this fun and informative program!

Sunday, July 5, 2009 "One's Heart is Enough," - presented by Rev. Jane Esbesen. Although the humanist core of UUism has a long and significant history, in recent years the face of UUism has changed to such a degree that humanism has come to be seen as a purely intellectual exercise, and spirituality and Jesus-talk/God-talk are considered to be where the real heart of humanity lies, where the real heart of UUism lies. Born and raised a UU, Jane Esbesen speaks to us this Sunday about the language of the times and what

is really at stake in our congregations and in society at large. Rev. Jane Esbensen was ordained in 1996 in Menomonie, Wisconsin after spending five years studying at a UCC (United Church of Christ/Congregational) seminary in Minnesota. Jane has served several congregations in both Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Sunday, July 12, 2009 "Religions of the World," presenter TBA.

Sunday, July 19, 2009 "Tribal Connections to the Earth." An experiential, multigenerational/intergenerational service looking at world tribal rituals, customs and story telling to create a spiritual connection with nature that honors the earth and leads to individual connections and a sense of reverence/wonder with our environment.

Sunday, July 26, 2009 Joint Unitarian Universalist Service in Sauk City.

Another great summer tradition, every July, the four UU societies in the area (First Unitarian, James Reeb UU, Prairie, and Free Congregation of Sauk County,) get together for a joint service and picnic at the Sauk City Freethinker's Hall.

Prairie Web Sites:

Society Home Page
www.uuprairie.org

News Group
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/prairie/news/>

Views
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/prairie/views/>

Social Action
<http://socialaction.madisonwi.us>

Humanist Union
<http://humanist.madisonwi.us>

Religious Education News

I've just come from a meeting with outgoing chair, Karen Deaton, and I'm very impressed with how many different events come under the jurisdiction of RE! Of course, they only work with the participation of so many of you.



We are into our summer schedule when volunteers are leading activities for all ages of Prairie youth on Sunday mornings. There are still some slots available later in the summer, and we have found that because of the increased numbers of kids, we can use helpers! Please sign up on the poster in the meeting room or feel free to stop down any Sunday if you can help.

Our next upcoming event is Summer Spree, July 24-26, a weekend of games, swimming and fun for youth entering 6th grade or older. If you want to sign up your child or volunteer to help out or chaperone, please let me know.

In August we will be sending out registration materials and organizing teacher training. We will kick off the new school year with our Summer Splash Pool Party in Middleton. And plan ahead for the weekend of October 23-25. Our new retreat location, Pine Lake, features a playground, canoes, rowboats, volleyball courts, baseball and soccer fields, a nature center and possibly even a low ropes course for kids 8 and up.

It's been heartening to see the growth of our RE program over the last few years and the eagerness and excitement of our young people. Thanks to all the parents who get their kids up and ready on Sunday morning, to the teachers, helpers and child care workers who provide the program, to the RE Committee and Rebecca for their hard work, and to the congregation for ongoing support.

Robin Proud, RE Committee Chair

Our Society

Prairie Elders Meet June 23rd

Prairie People over 65 are invited to the Prairie Elders meeting Tuesday, June 23. Conversation 1:30 pm. Discussion 2:00-4:00. Location details below. Newcomers welcome.

HOT TOPIC: Bailouts, Incentives, Stimulus Plans. How do they affect you or your relatives, friends, city, state? Debt implications for younger generations? What do critics say? Will we be in better shape or in breadlines next year? (If you know, call the White House.) Or any other aspect you wish to briefly expound upon.

Relevant websites: <http://www.recovery.gov/>

<http://www.propublica.org/special/government-bailouts>

http://financialservices.house.gov/essa/summary_of_the_eesa2.pdf

LOCATION: Nakoma Room, Heritage Oaks building, Oakwood Village West. Parking in front or underneath the building. Call contacts below for directions or a ride.

DISCUSSION FORMAT: Our "round robin" format gives all an opportunity to speak and to hear. Topics alternate between general issues and personal interests.

SNACKS: If convenient, please bring your own beverage cup and a few snacks to pass.

ABOUT US: Prairie Elders aims to provide good times and mutual support for Prairie UU Members and Friends over 65. Current participants range from age 65 to 90-something. We welcome other UUs who live in the facility where we meet.

CONTACTS: Donna Murdoch 238-3802, Gordon Cunningham 230-3367, Rosemary Dorney 238-4382 or Rose Smith 233-3363.

Spanish Speaker's Potluck

The next Spanish Speaker's potluck will be Tuesday, June 30th, 6:30 pm, at the home of Amy Schulz, 2304 South Syene Road. Her number is 273-2639; please call if you need directions. For more information or to arrange a ride, please call Rosemary Dorney at 238-4382.

WOW group

Prairie's Women's group, known as WOW, met on June 13th for breakfast potluck and had a great discussion and sharing of knowledge about sunscreens. One of the most useful things we shared at this meeting was information about a website that can help you navigate choosing good health and beauty products, from toothpaste to makeup to sunscreen. The site is www.cosmeticsdatabase.org, and is part of the Environmental Working Group, a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the public's awareness of toxic chemicals.

We have a tentative meeting date set for July - Saturday the 11th at 9am at Prairie. However, since many of us will be gone for vacations, please RSVP with Mary Somers (276-8397) if you think you'll make on that date.

Book Club Announces Selection for July

The Prairie Book Club will be reading [The Sewing Circles of Herat: A Personal Voyage Through Afghanistan](#) by Christina Lamb. The author, as a 21-year-old "visited Peshawar during the Russian assault on Afghanistan. For months she traveled with mujaheddin warriors, and became acquainted with the young Hamid Karzai, along with men who later became Taliban. Woven into her experiences is an appreciation for what that land was like before the war, one of tribal warring and vengeance culture, yet softened by the warriors' love of poetry and flowers.... The sewing circle was actually a group of women whose sewing meeting was actually a literary circle that masked a course in literature that heavily robed women took three days a week. A Herat University professor introduced them to criticism and aesthetics along with such writers as Shakespeare, Joyce, and Nabakov. Children served as guards, and word of a Talib in the area would result in the sudden appearance of half-finished garments. An estimated 29,000 girls received secret

education in similar ways under Taliban control. Although the Herat museum and library were emptied, the people managed to protect their culture in other ways, under fear of death." (Comments from

<http://eclectic-reader.blogspot.com/2008/02/christina-lamb-sewing-circles-of-herat.html>)

Dates have been set for the next few months of the book club, and books will be chosen at the July 19th meeting. The dates are as follows: August 23, September 20, October 24, and November 22. All of these meetings are Sundays after service with the exception of October, which is the Saturday of Prairie's retreat at Pine Lake.

Jane Esbensen Meets With Humanist Union

The Humanist Union's July meeting will be on July 5th at Prairie. Join us for our potluck lunch at noon, or come from 12:30 - 1:30 pm for a discussion led by humanist UU minister Jane Esbensen. Jane is a graduate of the Humanist Leadership Studies Program of The Humanist Institute and is currently working for the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Jane will also be Prairie's Sunday morning speaker. All who are interested are invited to stay for this afternoon discussion as well.

-Bob Park

Green Committee News

Your Green Committee is hard at work these days. Here are some of their recent projects:

(1) A couple of Committee members have met to design preliminary plans for making Prairie's backyard more welcoming to wildlife and... people. Various plants and shrubs have been contemplated along with maybe a terrace-like area. These plans will be circulated to get more input. The Committee would like for Prairie members and friends to consider donating any of the plants they grow in their gardens to this endeavor! This will be one of the Green Committee projects that the RE Committee will coordinate.

(2) We have purchased some handcrafts from Chalate (a fund-raising arm of the Madison- Arcatao (El Salvador) Sister City project). Proceeds from the resale of these items at Prairie will be donated to the Madison Quaker's My Lai (Vietnam) Loan Fund. This will be one of Prairie's Environmental Justice projects.

(3) We have begun conversations with the Program Committee to present services in the fall of 2009 and the spring of 2010 centered on several Green Committee projects. This will be part of one of the projects in the Worship category of the Green Committee.

-Randy Converse

New Member Profile

Katherine Peterson, new member

I have been a passionate student of self care for many years. As a yoga instructor with over 15 years of teaching in a variety of settings, I became interested in deepening this practice. Through this search (one of many!) I became a Feldenkrais Practitioner. This method is wonderfully gentle and useful for deepening awareness in any kind of movement from the most functional (bending to pick up a child), subtle (breathing), to the most refined (fingering and bowing a stringed instrument).

I am currently working privately in my in home practicing yoga and Feldenkrais. Concurrently I am home schooling, or what we think of as self directed learning with Chris, our 14-year old son. This has been one of the more amazing journeys of my life. Humbling, and unendingly interesting our adventures together have given me amazing insight into my son, and given us a chance to be closer at a time when many young people are moving away from their parents. We spend a good deal of time reading great books together (classics that range from Jane Austin to "The Iliad" though we haven't gotten to that one, yet), have wonderful in depth discussions, sometimes launch a project, and finally write.

I was born in 1957 (age 51) grew up the North side of Chicago, in Mayfair Park. I attended Catholic elementary schools up through college and grew up among many European immigrant families. As I

told my new friends from the Prairie orientation I was always a spiritual seeker, searching out "best practices" for as long as I can remember! My experiences have taken me from fascination with cloistered nuns, to "being saved" by an Evangelical friend as a vulnerable young teenager, to interest in the Science of Mind Church, defining my own personal feminine spirituality, to Buddhist traditions and the study of meditation. Prairie is a perfect fit, as I love small accessible environments with lots of room to move around.

Several years ago my husband of 15 years and I were shocked at how complex our lives had become. We lived in a lovely comfortable home in Evanston, Illinois, but our lives felt consumed with obligations and a fast pace that didn't match our aspiration to "live simply." After much soul searching we decided to "downsize and simplify", though I'd suggest it's better said than done, and would probably have been easier in much smaller steps. Some complex thrashing around has had to occur before the pleasures of simplification could be enjoyed! Long story short, we bought and built a "just right" sized "green" home on the shores of the Yahara River, an easy walk to our little Victorian downtown Stoughton. After well over 2 years of planning, building, moving twice and getting settled in a new state we are likely in the final throes of getting settled into our new lives.

I spent many years in corporate America in managed health care and health care executive search, working my way through school. I was glad to retire that aspect of my life when I became pregnant with our first child. I am a forever student who can be found taking courses, learning new skills, reading a lot, traveling, sewing, messing around with permaculture concepts, cooking, and much to the chagrin of our children always "asking more questions than anyone else!" As a family we are passionate about reading aloud daily, travel, music (all kinds) cooking, gardening, kayaking, walking our dogs Coco (bernese mountain dog) and Nacho (rat terrier). We've barely scratched the surface of the many amazing places to visit in Wisconsin, so we'd love to hear about yours!

Gary is my husband of 16 years, the president and owner of a commercial real estates appraisal firm in the Chicago area. Our children are Chris, age 14, a self directed learner, who relishes classic rock, plays and studies drums, electric bass guitar, acoustic guitar, and is now noodling around with the piano again. He reads a lot and is aspiring to start a band. Katie, age 9, is energy personified, adopted at age 4 1/2 from South Korea, friendly, outgoing, singer, lover of the "Geronimo Stilton" book series, and all manner of poetry. You'll find Katie eager to try anything new and deeply passionate about animals.

We are delighted to have found Prairie, which feel to me like a "just right" sized community of open minds and heart!

Katherine Peterson

Rev. Ralph's Ruminations

Many thanks to those who have been sharing their thoughts on PrairieViews regarding the topic of how Prairie members wish to express their theological identity and what it means to be a Prairie member and how that plays out in the way we employ different languages in describing our practices as a congregation. It would seem that those who have entered into this conversation have touched on a persistent issue that has challenged UU congregations for more than 45 years. What do we mean when we say we are a Unitarian Universalist? I offer for your Summer time reading a short capsulated section of the much longer report available online at the UUA website (www.uua.org) *Engaging Our Theological Diversity: A Report by the Commission on Appraisal* (Unitarian Universalist Association, May 2005)



The questions that were addressed by this diverse group of UU's were as follows:
Framing the Question: What Holds Us Together?
History: Where Do We Come From?

Culture: Who Are We?

Values: To What Do We Aspire?

Theology: How Do We Frame the World?

Worship: How Do We Celebrate?

Justice Making: How Shall We Serve?

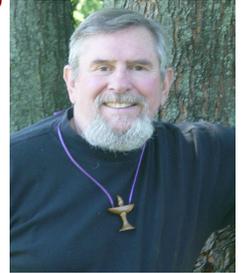
Community: How Do We Come Together?

At the end of this almost two hundred page report are these concluding recommendations. They were not meant to be binding on any UU member or UU congregation!

“Affirm Cultural Competency

The Commission recommends a continuing commitment at all levels of the Association to a deeper understanding and acceptance of cross-cultural issues between and among diverse peoples, especially those within our congregations and those who might join. Unitarian Universalism is changing; it is becoming more and more diverse—theologically, spiritually, and culturally. This is happening slowly, but steadily enough for us to consider the implications of this change. Can we do a better job of welcoming others into our midst? Absolutely. In making a concerted effort to respect others, UUs have come to appreciate the roles of cultural sensitivity and cultural competency. Cultural competency values diversity and is willing to create a cultural self-assessment, to be aware of the differences at work among diverse cultures, and to institutionalize cultural knowledge. Cultural competency moves us toward being

comfortable with and appreciating “the other” and creating policies and practices that ensure universal access to UU religious life in community. Valuing diversity means respecting, not merely accepting, difference. When we sing a song out of cultural context, for example, we are not practicing cultural competency. More simply, if someone exploring the possibility of a new spiritual home calls a UU church to find out what time a service is and asks, “What time is Mass?” and the person answering the phone responds huffily, “We don’t have Mass, we have a service, we aren’t a Catholic church!” that person has not only been ungracious but simply unwelcoming. Cultural competency includes the practices of humility, listening, patience, graciousness, and the holiest of curiosities. Rather than asking a newcomer, “What brings you here? How did you find us?” what if we were to ask as the Tibetans used to do, “And to what sublime tradition do you belong?” However we do it, when we communicate graciousness, generosity, and openness, we represent Unitarian Universalism at its best.



Engage Theology

The Commission recommends that individual UUs and congregations acknowledge and deal with theological diversity rather than avoid it. Many adult UUs have told us that discussing theology and beliefs is not a frequent part of their congregational life. When pressed, most acknowledge that this is in part an attempt to avoid conflict and disagreement. A number of youth agreed with this assessment, adding that they felt many adults do not like to talk about what they believe because they are not sure what that actually is and are afraid of looking uninformed or unintelligent. Sweeping UU theological diversity under the rug by refusing to talk about it in community is not a healthy way to approach the issue. Tolerance requires conversation, not avoidance. Talking about beliefs, learning from one another, and stimulating everyone’s thinking through open and honest sharing of views should be encouraged in UU congregational life. During our focus group meetings with representatives from the UUA’s affiliated theological identity groups, they all told us that life in a theologically homogenized congregation would be boring and would not provide sufficient stimulation to further personal growth. However, without open dialogue, the diversity that exists within the community cannot have this growth stimulating effect.

Such open sharing needs to happen intentionally, with planning and forethought, through adult RE programs, small-group ministry, and other programmatic congregational events. This sort of planning will encourage that individual UUs and congregations acknowledge and deal with theological diversity rather than avoid it. Many of the youth and young adults with whom we spoke told us that this dialogue, a common part of the shared experience of youth groups and YRUU events, is one of the main things they miss when they bridge to the adult community. Their mutual dialogue helps them to understand,

learn from, and respect each other. This may be a place where the grown-ups can learn a great deal from the youth.

What Next?

With a topic such as this, it is not surprising that there has been considerable difference of opinion within the Commission, even about how to frame the question. One thing on which we have full agreement, however, is that this topic is vitally important for the health and future of our denomination. As mentioned in the first chapter, we have sometimes felt like we were breaking a taboo by raising this question. However, the tremendous response and enthusiasm with which many have greeted our efforts suggest that this is a taboo people are glad to see broken. It is like the story of the elephant in the living room: Everyone knows it is very large and very present, but there is an unspoken agreement to pretend it isn't there. The elephant for Unitarian Universalism is our lack of articulation about who we are and what we have in common, and the Commission believes the time is ripe to cease pretending it doesn't exist and actively confront it. What might our faith look like twenty years from now if we move in the direction of the Commission's recommendations? We asked participants in focus groups to describe to us their dream of that future day. In the UU Buddhist group, one participant told us, "My dream is to be in a community where people have a depth experience of truth, then begin to see it in other places. They start to see there isn't only 'one way.' They have the flexibility to worship in different languages." Another imagines congregations where "diverse spiritual disciplines are explored in depth—everyone into it, but different practices for different folks. It would not be like going to the zoo or supermarket—a bit of this and that." Near the beginning of this report, we quoted a participant in the Covenant of UU Pagans focus group when she said, "We [UUs] offer the hope of a spiritual journey, and we offer no tools to do it with." A future dream would be to develop and share those tools for enhancing our direct experience of embodied spirituality. Participants from the Process Theology Network sketched a vision of a church embracing the diversity of society: "Music needs to change to make people feel welcome and to reflect the diversity of the people. The people in the pews need to loosen up in general and embody what we're all about." Worship, according to this participant, needs to include elements that feed all the senses.

Someone in the UU Christian Fellowship group also hoped for a day when "People in the pews would look like those outside. We would share more common beliefs—holding ourselves accountable to something—so we could relax with our diversity." Another imagined that "It would be fun—the spirit would be alive. Worship would be more integrative and joyous, including drama, dance, music—drums and guitars—touch and all five senses. If the whole self is not in worship, it is not worth doing." A third pictured a place where "Membership meant you were a disciple of love and freedom." From the UUs for Jewish Awareness focus group comes the dream of a community "well beyond tolerant and into open, welcoming and intrigued by diversity—a place to experience 'more ready wonder.'" A participant in the Humanist focus group offered this vision: "If we can get beyond our fears about expressing our diversity without either giving or taking offense, that's the work of peace and justice in the world." What is remarkable about these visions of the future is that very few participants named elements that those in other groups would find unappealing. All these voices join together to create a vision of an open community, reflecting the diversity of society, where people can find tools to touch the depths of human possibility in a number of different ways. All value making people welcome and treating them with respect, encouraging imagination and flexibility, being spiritually multilingual and vitally alive. All express commitment to the work of peace and justice in the world, and to responsible cherishing of our natural environment. Most yearn for more nourishing theological articulations of our common ground, and would embrace the call for an embodied spirituality and the experience of "more ready wonder."

The Commission on Appraisal does not see this report as the end of a process; rather, we hope it will be a beginning. We have raised the issue, and asked many questions; now it is time for us all to engage collectively, thoughtfully, and respectfully, in the challenging process of searching for answers. What could our UU faith be like if our congregations truly became the safe and welcoming place we aspire to create? If we truly did honor and celebrate both our theological diversity and our sources of unity? If we were willing to commit to spiritual discipline as deeply as to spiritual freedom? "Whether we now have the seeds of a liberating faith is not really a question. Deluding ourselves into thinking that admiring the

seeds will make them grow is the issue at hand,” writes a contemporary UU prophet. What marvels might be possible if we took these seeds and planted and tended them? What wondrous blossoms might arise?”

As the days of Summer are at hand we may have a little more “leisure” time to engage in fruitful discussion and conversation about the many issues that surround our “theological” diversity and “religious” identity. We should not be afraid to open ourselves to the discussion and be willing to listen to one another “with open minds and open hearts”.

Glad to be journeying with you.

Rev. Ralph

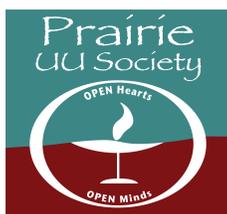
From the Wider UU Community

Summer WomanSpirit Retreat 2009 August 7-9, 2009, Ronora Lodge and Retreat Center, Watervliet, Michigan. Come to Ronora and help us “Embrace our Diversity & Celebrate our Unity” ! We will be contemplating how differences between us can be what make us whole as a community. How our complementary talents show us we are one. This incredible time that we are living in has brought down many walls, not without some discomfort. We can seek to nurture each other's strengths in order to better our world. We hope that the weekend inspires us all to be connected with the ones around us. Come share in the joy and the love! For more information, please visit <http://www.womenandreligion.org/index.php/sws2009-brochure>.

Bayside Unitarian Universalist Family Camp still has room for families to join them. The camp is being held at Wesley Woods Conference Center on beautiful Lake Geneva in Wisconsin, from July 12th through July 18th, 2009. We are looking for families of all configurations to join us for a fun week on the lake. Day Camp, Tween and Teen groups are offered mornings while adults are invited to attend morning worship and workshops, or to hike around the lake or enjoy the quiet of your cabin or room. To register on-line or for more information, go to www.yahoodrummers.com/bayside/ or look up Bayside Family UU Camp.

Input Deadlines:

Calendar items and program descriptions are due on the **1st** and **15th** of every month. Feature articles for the full *Prairie Fire* are due on the 15th of each month. Please send to Kate Liu at admin@uuprairie.org or call 271-8218.



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