

# Prairie Fire

October  
2021



Heidi Hughes is the leader for the discussion of *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Others attending the first session were Martin Arnold and Rachel Long, Mary Mullen, Nancy Schraufnagel, Barbara Park, Penny Eiler, Mary Somers, Morris Sadicario, Andrea Scott, and Ruth Dougherty. People may join the study group at any time. Screenshot taken by Mary Mullen.

## Prairie Contacts

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Please see [www.uuprairie.org](http://www.uuprairie.org) for other contacts, including board members and committee chairs.

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# October Calendar

Please see [www.uuprairie.org](http://www.uuprairie.org) for detailed descriptions & public event links (where applicable)

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## Friday 1 (every Friday)

- 4:30p Advanced D&D

## Saturday 2

- 10a Prairie WOW
- 4:30p Beginner D&D (every Saturday)

## Sunday 3

- 10a Service: "Welcome All: New Member Recognition" by Prairie

## Tuesday 5

- 7p Trivia (1st Tuesday)

## Sunday 10

- 10a Service: Question Box service by Rev. Matt Aspin

## Monday 11

- 7p Study Group: *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson

## Sunday 17

- 10a Service: "Evoking Spiritual Experience in Our Lives" by Ilene Haykus

## Saturday 23

- 10a Creativity & Connection

## Sunday 24

- 10a Service: TBA

## Monday 25

- 7p Study Group: *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson

## Sunday 31

- 10a Service: "All Souls' Day" by Prairie



Our Little Library has been re-painted and re-installed by Randy Converse & Gene Kain, with a post donation from Bob Park. Picture taken by Nancy Wunderlin.

# Minister's Musings

Rev. Matt Aspin, Minister



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I've been thinking and talking a lot about Covenant this month. Covenants-the promises we make with each other expressing how we intend to be in relationship-are a foundational element in the historical development of the Unitarian Universalist faith tradition. These days, in a world marked by deep ideological divisions and the confusing dissemination of "fake news," having spaces where we can feel safe and secure in community are more important than ever.

Our covenants are the mechanisms we use to help create a level of safety in our relationships. I discovered that this community developed a beautiful covenant over a decade ago. It was great work, and the words seem to have stood the test of time. Unfortunately, this powerful and life-affirming covenant fell victim to one thing that can take all of the power away from a communal promise like this...it was all but forgotten!

I pulled this document out, dusted it off, and offered it to the Board as a foundation upon which we could begin to develop our new relationship. We plan to review a part of this Covenant at the beginning of each meeting, to reground ourselves in our higher aspirations as we lean in to tackle whatever challenges emerge over the course of the coming church year. (Unexpected roller coaster pandemic numbers, anyone?).

This month, I would invite everyone to take a look at the Congregational Covenant of Good Relations this community drafted all those years ago ([click here to review](#)). Is it still relevant? Is it missing anything? Does it need to be revised, or just better remembered? And, most importantly...how well are we each adhering to these intentions?

Have you ever found yourself holding back from speaking your truth directly to anyone in this community? The fear at the root of most of these types of hesitations is a concern about safety. How much more confidence might each of us possess if we entered into potentially difficult conversations by first reviewing and affirming our shared agreements like, "We stay engaged with each other through difficult conversations" and, "We trust that we are all doing what we think is right."

I close my time here this month echoing the words from the last line of your Covenant: "May we, as Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society, strive to live up to this commitment through practicing the use of these attitudes and behaviors."

# Reverend Matt's Chats

## Rev. Matt Aspin, Minister

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With a goal of expanding and deepening relationships amongst us all, I'd like to begin offering a time for facilitated online community connection. Any and all that are curious about what this type of space could become are invited to attend. The only gathering I'll plan up front is the first one (which will be used to ground us in the safety of Covenant).



Initially offering 2 times...one during the day, one during the evening. Whoever shows up can determine the schedule going forward. (Feel free to visit one or both as your other commitments allow). Newer members are especially encouraged to attend and help to shape the conversation.

Option 1: Tuesday, Sept 28th, 1-2

Option 2: Wednesday, Sept 29th, 7:30-8:30

RSVP by emailing [minister@uuprairie.org](mailto:minister@uuprairie.org) We'll see how it goes and can adapt as needed.

So...what do you want to talk about?

# Sunday Services Moved to Zoom

## Rachel Long, President

### Madison, WI metro

Updated on September 24

RISK LEVEL ⓘ

• **VERY HIGH**

Daily new cases

• **36.8** PER 100K

Infection rate

• **1.20**

Positive test rate

• **5.1%**

On September 17, Metro Madison Covid transmission reached "very high" according to the site that the UUA recommends:

[https://covidactnow.org/us/metro/madison\\_wi?s=23101230](https://covidactnow.org/us/metro/madison_wi?s=23101230)

The August UUA guidance for responding to the delta variant of Covid <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/delta-guidance> set "very high" as the threshold for going all virtual, stating "In areas where transmission risk is Very High or Severe, (per the [COVID Act Now data](#)), suspend all large, in-person (indoor and outdoor) gatherings such as worship, concerts, or fundraisers."

Our Board will continue to closely monitor transmission rates, and work with our Minister, Program Committee and Religious Exploration Committee to respond accordingly. We all fervently hope that the current wave of Covid will soon pass, and we can return to in-person services. Please check the website and PrairieneWS to find out when transmission has decreased enough for us to resume meeting in person in our Meeting Hall, and Religious Exploration classes outdoors.

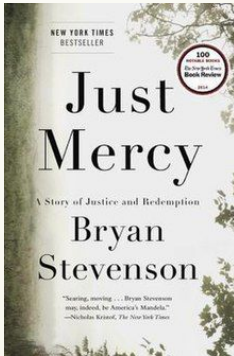
I am so proud of how our community has adapted rapidly and creatively to stay connected while keeping each other and the wider community safe.

# Study Group - Get Ready for October!

Rachel Long, President

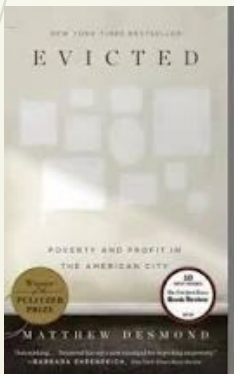
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All are welcome to join Study Group on zoom every 2nd and 4th Monday at 7-8:30 pm for discussion of any or all of our selections. See the website for the link. Upcoming selections for this fall:



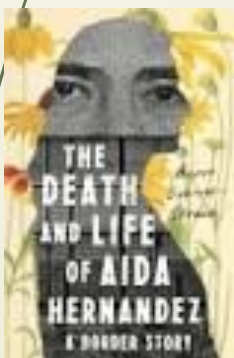
**October - *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson**, led by Pam Gates.

Mr. Stevenson founded the Equal Justice Initiative, which is committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, challenging racial and economic injustice, and protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society. "An unforgettable true story about the potential for mercy to redeem us, and a clarion call to end mass incarceration in America — from one of the most inspiring lawyers of our time."



**NOVEMBER - *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Matthew Desmond**, led by Suzanne Gernandt

"This book gave me a better sense of what it is like to be very poor in this country than anything else I have read. . . . It is beautifully written, thought-provoking, and unforgettable." — Bill Gates. Won the Pulitzer prize along with many other awards. The author went to UW Madison and the families he discusses are in Milwaukee.



**DECEMBER - *The Death and Life of Aida Hernandez - A Border Story* by Aaron Bobrow-Strain**, led by Deesa Pence

"Bobrow-Strain writes like a journalist and sociologist, with clear information on history and policy, along with plenty of narrative tension. Hernandez is not a perfect immigrant (she has a criminal record), but she's a real one, and her story provides insight into how the larger immigration machine actually works." — Adriana E. Ramirez, Los Angeles Times

**Study Group Calendar** - Every 2nd and 4th Monday at 7-8:30 pm

October 11 & 25 - *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson

November 8 & 22 - *Evicted* by Matthew Desmond

December 13 - *Aida Hernandez* by Aaron Bobrow-Strain

January 10 & 24 - *The Water Dancer* by Ta-Nehisi Coates

February 14 & 28 - *Behind the Kitchen Door* by Saru Jayaraman

There is still room for YOUR book in the spring. Let me know what selection you would like to lead!

Rachel Long, President  
Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society

# Study Group Continues With Braiding Sweetgrass

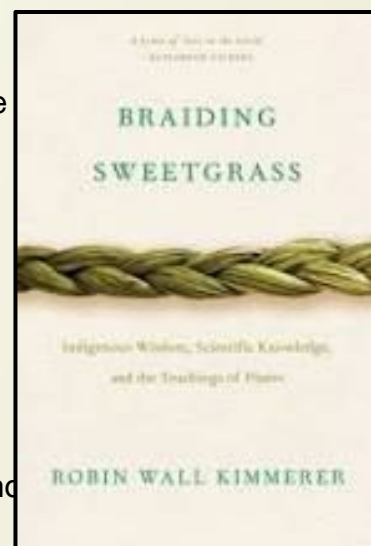
Mary Mullen, Archives Committee

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The Prairie Study Group has begun its fall schedule after the summer recess. Last year the group concentrated on Black/White relations. This year we are starting with an emphasis on Indigenous knowledge.

Eleven of us met on September 13 to discuss Robin Wall Kimmerer's Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants. The discussion will continue on Monday, 9/27 at 7 pm on Zoom.

All of us agreed that this book touched us in ways that made us understand the difference between our white European culture and Indigenous American culture.



An example is comparing the Adam and Eve story to the Potawatomi creation story. We all know the Garden of Eden story where a woman's use of the fruit of a plant results in the first couple being thrown out of the garden to endure a life of work and pain. In the Potawatomi story Skywoman falls through a hole in the sky, is cared for by animals, and together with her populate "turtle island" with life-giving plants. The Potawatomi story shows how cooperation with nature – plants and animals – brings the good life.

## Going Once, Going Twice, Sold!!!

Chris Porter, Finance Committee Chair



The Prairie auction is set for **Sunday November 4th at the meeting house!** (If we are unable to meet in person we will try to develop another way to purchase items.) Have you thought of what you can offer? Please keep covid safety and uncertainty in mind for anything you offer. Perhaps instead of gathering a group for a shared meal you could offer to deliver a meal. We expect to have the 2022 auction in March so, for this auction consider items that would be good for the fall and winter months. Here is a link to the submission form. [Please submit your offerings here by October 21st](#) as thoroughly as possible. If you have any questions contact Chris Porter at [finance@uuprairie.org](mailto:finance@uuprairie.org) or Suzanne Gernandt at [treasurer@uuprairie.org](mailto:treasurer@uuprairie.org).

# Religious Exploration (RE)

Alice Mandt, Director of Religious Exploration

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I thought that since we are, again, in the uncharted territory of not meeting in person, and we're not sure when we are going to start again, I would like to share some material you might want to discuss with your children.

- [UU World](#) magazine includes a pull-out, full color section of timely and engaging faith-building activities to share at home. The Families section is edited by Susan Lawrence, Managing Editor of the UUA Lifespan Faith Engagement Office. Check out [UU World Family Pages](#) for PDF versions of this section of the UU World.
- Another way to keep children engaged in Unitarian Universalism while we are not meeting is to simply post the 7 Principles (the children's version) somewhere in your home and choose one to discuss each day.



# Committee on Ministry

## Paula Pachciarz, Nominating Committee Chair

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As Prairie begins its unprecedented relationship with a full time minister, it is our obligation to assemble a committee whose work is crucial to both making the relationship a success, and to achieving our common goals. The Committee on Ministry will work with the board, minister, congregation and other committees with the goals of strengthening the congregation's ministry, which is the action we take to fulfill our mission. This committee will evaluate the performance of our minister, and give feedback to our leaders and congregation as a whole as to how to better fulfill our mission, including how we manifest our values within our congregation and in the local and global communities. Prairie's Mission Statement can be found in the "About" section of the Prairie website and in Volume II of the Prairie History book.

Are you interested in serving on this committee and working towards these goals? Rev. Matt and President Rachel Long have each chosen a committee member, Katrina Thompson and Barb Park, respectively, and according to our bylaws, the Nominating Committee nominates someone to be the third member, to be voted on by the congregation. If you do have an interest in serving Prairie in this way, or if you have any questions, please contact us at [nominating@UUPrairie.org](mailto:nominating@UUPrairie.org)

What are some specific expectations of a Committee on Ministry member?

- create policies and procedures for the Committee on Ministry to support its work
- conduct periodic evaluations of Rev. Matt and support his ministry
- evaluate how leadership and the congregation as a whole are performing in furthering our mission, and provide feedback so that all can improve
- suggest to Prairie leaders possible changes in structures or procedures that would improve the effectiveness of our ministry
- keep the focus on the big picture and on the mission and vision of our society
- meet periodically with Rev. Matt, the Prairie President or Board, and other congregational leaders

Prairie has never had a committee on ministry that functions this way, and committee members will be helping to define how this committee will function in order to be most effective. We have documents from the UUA and our minister to help guide you in creating this new committee. We look forward to hearing from you! The Nominating Committee

Kent Wenger, Becca Strome, Paula Pachciarz, Heidi Hughes





# Back to Zoom, and Prairie Retreat Memories

Mary Mullen, Archives Committee Chair

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Wasn't that short-lived? We had a very few very glorious weeks back in our newly remodeled meeting house, but with the COVID-19 Delta variant spreading in the Madison/Dane County area, Prairie is back to Zoom, starting this past Sunday, September 19.

Although none of us welcome the resurgence of infection, several Zoom attendees spoke in favor of always having an online option for our in-person services. Zoom coverage was discontinued when we could finally get into our building after a more than 2-year absence. *(editor note: When meeting in-person, we don't have the person power to run both live services and live virtual services concurrently. Services are audio recorded and available in the Member Section of our website.)*

Speaking for myself, it was great to be able to hear every word of Rev. Matt's talk which compared a healthy prairie and a healthy Prairie. The virtual big bluestem prairie behind him reminded me of our mostly virtual retreat last year where a lucky two dozen folks had a chance to meet in person around a real fire surrounded by prairie grasses at the Holy Wisdom Monastery. *(editor note: our next in person retreat is scheduled for April 29th to May 1st 2022)*



Big bluestem grass waves in the wind as Barbara Park participates in the keylog ceremony at the Prairie retreat, on 9/26/20. Photo by Mary Mullen.



Rev. Matt Aspin, with a virtual big bluestem prairie behind him, spoke over Zoom about "Healing Spaces." Pictured above are 7 of the 40-some listeners to his September 19th reflections: Martin Arnold and Rachel Long, Maria Dahman, Suzanne Gernandt, and Marilyn and Rick Ruecking. Screenshot by Mary Mullen.