

Prairie Fire

December
2021



The Prairie Auction held on 11/7/21. Picture taken by Renee Deschard.

Prairie Contacts

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Please see www.uuprairie.org for other contacts, including board members and committee chairs.

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December Calendar

Please see www.uuprairie.org for detailed descriptions & public event links (where applicable)

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Wednesday 1 (every Wednesday)

- 1p Rev. Matt's Chats
- 7:30p Rev. Matt's Chats

Friday 3 (every Friday)

- 4:30p Advanced D&D

Saturday 4

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

Sunday 5

- 10a Service by John Gernandt

Tuesday 7

- 7p Trivia (1st Tuesday)

Sunday 12

- 10a Service: "Symbol Tree" by Prairie

Monday 13

- 7p Study Group: The Death and Life of Aida Hernandez-A Border Story by Aaron Bobrow-Strain

Sunday 19

- 10a Service by Rev. Matt Aspin

Monday 20

- 7p Study Group: The Death and Life of Aida Hernandez-A Border Story by Aaron Bobrow-Strain

Sunday 26

- 10a Service: TBA



Kids gather outside on 10/31/21, while indoors the All Souls' Day service takes place. Picture taken by Renee Deschard.

Fall Parish Meeting 11/21/21

Rachel Long, President

We had a very productive Fall Parish Meeting, with 51 of our 110 members in attendance. Here are some highlights.

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- To start the meeting, Reverend Matt reviewed with us our [Covenant of Good Relations](#)
- We elected Margit Moses to serve as At Large Board Member, to fill out the term of Penny Eiler, who resigned. Congratulations, Margit!
- Members were encouraged to complete the survey from the Committee on Ministry to supply feedback about our new minister. The Board intends to negotiate a contract with Rev. Matt for the 2022/23 year, contingent on the results of this feedback.
- Religious Exploration classes hope to move inside starting in January, with additional air filtration for each room to help reduce risk of Covid transmission. Children are welcome to join their parents in the main meeting room. Members were strongly encouraged to contribute their time and talents to help the RE program.
- The Board and the Widening the Circle Committee will be developing a series of Sunday presentations to the congregation to share their learnings and recommendations.
- After a lot of discussion, the proposed budget for 2022 was approved with just 1 “no” vote. The main concern was the decision to use money from reserves to allow us to continue on our current path with full time ministry while we focus on growing our membership and our ministry during the pandemic.

Study Group Upcoming Selections

Rachel Long, President

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

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

JANUARY - *The Water Dancer* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, led by Morris Sadacarrío

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • OPRAH'S BOOK CLUB PICK • From the National Book Award-winning author of *Between the World and Me*, a boldly conjured debut novel about a magical gift, a devastating loss, and an underground war for freedom. "This potent book about America's most disgraceful sin establishes [Ta-Nehisi Coates] as a first-rate novelist." —*San Francisco Chronicle*

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

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

March - 14 & 28 - to be determined

April 11 & 25 - [Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism](#)
edited by Daisy Hernandez and Bushra Rehman

May 9 & 23 - to be determined



Minister's Report

Rev. Matt Aspin, Minister



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It is said that over and above the day-to-day administration, the preaching, the pastoral care, the social justice work, and whatever else...that there are 3 important functions a minister plays in a community.

The first thing a minister should do is to listen to and help you interpret your story. The second part is to repeat your story. And the last part is to help you craft the next part of your story. Lucky for me, this community has a pretty great story. I've spent my first few months on the job doing everything I can to just listen to you to ensure I have a clear and current understanding of your collective narrative. I've gotten to know many of your individual stories, but I've also been listening very carefully to what you each perceive to be the story of this unique place called Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society. Before I began here, I read through the parts of your story that were so diligently captured in your history books. And because of the caring efforts of your archivists, I've also been able to go back and look at different parts of your history through newsletters and recorded services. But mostly...I've tried to just show up and listen to the stories that make up the current chapter of the living history that continues to unfold within this community.

What has emerged is the story of a very special place. A self-directed community that feels more like a family than an institution. A place that has a spirit that was birthed and nurtured into being by some amazing folks that came before, that has been tended to and strengthened by some determined folks that are still showing us the way by the example of how they continue to contribute to the fabric that holds this community together, and a group of newer folks that has more recently stumbled upon this unique treasure and are eagerly trying to figure out what role they can best play to ensure the unique set of gifts that membership in this community bestows will continue on for the benefit of the next set of seekers that will eventually find us. A few chapters back, the members of this place had done an amazing job navigating some tough decisions that have created a very strong foundation for the next chapters to come. You worked through differences to create a beautiful, accessible space, ready to welcome new members looking for the types of gifts that this place has to offer. You've hired an amazing DRE that is ready to prepare the next generation to engage in a responsible search for truth and meaning in a world that grows continually more complex. And you've hired a minister to help carry some of the burden as the needs of this community continue to expand.

Then came a global pandemic, which has upset the foundation of pretty much everything we used to take for granted that made up our lives.

And then it occurred to me... the chapter of the story I have stepped into is smack dab in the middle of the classic hero's journey archetype. You set out on an adventure to grow and expand your influence in the wider world, and have suddenly come face to face with a foe that seems almost insurmountable as it generates new arms and continues to dig its claws deeper and deeper every time we think we've finally begun to push it back.

I know it's hard to hold on to hope at a time like this. And I am not going to offer any false promises that Covid is just going to go away anytime soon.

What I will offer, though, is that I believe in you. I have always defined a leader as someone that folks choose to follow. As I've gotten to know you, I can say without hesitation that from everything I have seen so far in my short time with you, I am ready to follow you into whatever challenges need to be faced next. Without hesitation.

Because this community has- in its DNA, passed down from the generations that have come before-what I think is needed more than anything else in the world today. You care. You show up for each other. You share your gifts. You see continually expanding knowledge as a path to greater understanding and decision-making. And you take responsibility for the well-being of the whole.

So this is the story that I've seen so far, and I've now repeated the story as I've heard it back to you for your consideration. As you come together as a community to begin to write the next chapters, I hope that this narrative will help provide some useful perspective.

The first year of a minister's tenure is really just about listening, and beginning to develop trust (which I hope I have been starting to do). In an odd way, the pandemic has forced me to turn down my natural human desire to begin to "do" whatever seems to be needed next, and has helped me to stay in listening mode (which is where I really should be anyway).

As we begin to work our way past this beastly pandemic, we will be working to find our way home again. But we will return home not who we were before the pandemic. We have all been changed in ways that are not yet fully clear. As we all work to make sense of what these changes mean, I will continue to do my best to hold up a mirror, and remind you of the strengths that you possess that have helped you get this far. Most of all, I am excited to begin partnering with all of you to begin to write the next chapters of the Prairie story.

The world needs more places like Prairie. And now that I understand your story, I can't wait to begin to share your story with the world. In these confusing times, your story is the one that needs to be told and spread. This natural Prairie contains needed medicine for a hurting world.



Committee On Ministry Report

Katrina Thompson

The purpose of the Committee on Ministry is to strengthen and support the congregational health of Prairie by promoting effective ministries in all areas of Prairie's mission.

The Committee on Ministry has met twice, with our first task to do a preliminary evaluation for Rev. Matt's ministry so that we can make a recommendation to the board about renewal of his contract. To that end, we have sent out a survey to the congregation. Once this urgent task is completed, we plan to focus our energies on the broader purpose of the committee.

The Committee on Ministry

Mary Frantz - maryjohnfrantz@gmail.com

Barb Park - barpark@gmail.com

Katrina Daly Thompson - yaghaffar.yaghafur@gmail.com

Religious Exploration (RE)

Alice Mandt, Director of Religious Exploration

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Our first event of the month is a honored Prairie tradition, Nifty Gifty. Please join us for a crafting extravaganza to help kids create gifts for their loved ones. Like last year, this year's Nifty Gifty will be conducted via Zoom. A crew of Nifty Gifty helpers will deliver kits with everything needed (and some treats), at no charge to participants. Four crafting sessions will take place the first weekend of December (Dec. 3-5) Click the link below to learn more and to sign up. Sign-up deadline is November 28, to allow time to assemble and deliver kits. [Nifty Gifty Sign-Up](#)

For the remainder of 2021 Prairie's Religious Exploration program will take place in Prairie's backyard on the Sunday's we are able to be in-person. Our aim is to have HEPA filtration units in the downstairs of the meeting house in each classroom by January, allowing for those participants ages 5 and older, to safely convene in the RE space in the basement.

Also beginning in January, The 2-5 year olds will continue to start their days in RE outside in Prairie's backyard. We will also have space in the Annex's living room for when the weather does not allow for outside activities. The living room in the Annex will also have a HEPA filtration unit. All ages es will be asked to wear masks.

For children under 2 we will ask that they accompany their parent or caretaker to the meeting room or that the parent or caregiver accompanying the child to join the 2-5 year olds either outside or in the Annex living room.

RE still needs volunteers to help our vision for January and beyond happen!!

4 Reasons to Volunteer with RE

It takes a Village: As the saying goes, "It takes a village to raise a child," and the same is true for creating and maintaining a positive and nurturing faith environment within a congregation.

A little goes a long way: Maybe you work full time and have other commitments and responsibilities. The big mistake here is thinking volunteering has to be an "all or nothing" thing. It doesn't. When it comes to helping out, a little can really go a long way. Spending a few hours per week or month takes the edge off of someone else who's probably already doing more than their share. So check your calendar and figure out how much time you can really devote to volunteer work, then make a commitment and stick to it.

Everyone has something to offer: Volunteering in a children's program can seem daunting if you believe you have to have teaching experience or be a "super nurturer" to contribute anything of worth. But volunteering in RE is so much more than that. Everyone is good at something, which means everyone has something to offer. In addition, different kids respond to different adults—your personality may be just the one to reach and inspire a child.

Prairie kids will benefit: Helping to oversee programs and projects for our children and youth will give our children and youth a more meaningful experience, and models the importance of participation in the larger community — and that should be motivation enough for anyone. It sends a positive message that you consider RE worthwhile.



Religious Exploration Committee Report

Karen Deaton, RE Committee Chair

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In the past year, lots has happened in Religious Exploration (RE): During our lockdown, we conducted weekly RE activities remotely, and even offered Nifty Gifty remotely. In May, we welcomed a new Director of Religious Exploration (DRE) - Alice Mandt. In June, we began conducting RE in person (outdoors and masked). Online Dungeons & Dragons games have continued.

Children will meet in Prairie's yard through the end of 2021, on Sundays when services happen in person. If HEPA filtration units can be procured for our downstairs classrooms, we plan to begin conducting RE indoors for students age 5 and up in January. Be aware that this plan may be affected by supply chain issues for those filtration units or by pandemic developments.

We are still discussing our plans for children under 5 (who cannot yet be vaccinated) and under 2 (who cannot be expected to wear masks). We are looking for creative solutions that will protect these children and other vulnerable congregants from covid exposure while serving these youngsters and their families.

We hope to begin offering RE indoors in January, after 5-12 year-olds have a chance to be vaccinated and we've gotten a portable HEPA filter for each RE room.

We are in dire need of adult volunteers for our RE program. If you want to volunteer or learn more about volunteering in RE, please contact our DRE Alice Mandt (dre@uuprairie.org or 608-698-4636).

If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns about Prairie's programming for children and youth, please contact a committee member!



On 11/13, volunteers moved things from the annex to the meeting house. Tim Scott, Andy Garst, Karen Deaton, Alice Mandt, not pictured Nancy Wunderlin (took picture) and Patty Stockdale.

Committee members: Karen Deaton (she/her/hers), Committee Chair; Jesse Garst (they/them/theirs); Karen Loughran (she/her/hers); Paula Pachciarz (she/her/hers); Carl Wacker (he/him/his). Marie and/or Jon Andrae are considering joining the committee.

Ex officio members: Alice Mandt (she/her/hers), DRE; Matt Aspin, (He/him/his) Minister

Caring Committee Report

Barbara Chatterton Frye, Caring Committee Chair

The Caring Committee is actively helping folks in our congregation, now with the wonderful assistance from Rev. Matt.

Do get in touch with me or anyone on our committee if you could use a little help.

Also, please contact me if you would like to participate in any way that works for you in helping others in this Prairie community. Even small contributions make a difference in people's lives.



Two Prairie kiddos "help" rake leaves.

Membership Committee Report

Patty Stockdale & Deesa Pence, Membership Committee Co-Chairs

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Membership Committee 2021 is composed of Deesa Pence and Patty Stockdale as co-chairs and Morris Sadicario as committee member. Please let us know if you are interested in joining the committee or if you like to be a greeter on Sunday Mornings.

Most **duties and responsibilities** of the Membership Committee have resumed to those of the pre pandemic times. Currently, Prairie is having Sunday services both in-person as well as online (link is posted on Prairie's website at uuprairie.org), so we are meeting and greeting current members and visitors with smiles on our faces and warm "hellos".

New Members: Prairie is excited and happy to welcome 8 new members into our congregation. They are Tami Bucholtz, Ilene and Peter Haykus, Mary Massey, Josh and Amber Labbus and their baby Jack, and Andrea and Tim Scott and their children Trevor, Amelia, and Aiden. Please read the [November Prairiefire](#) for more details about them,

Circle Dinner Groups: Before pandemic times, Circle Dinner groups gathered in each others' homes to share a meal; each participant brought a dish to share and the host typically prepared the entree. This fall, we formed four Circle Dinner groups early to take advantage of the warm weather to eat safely outside. Now, as the weather becomes colder, each group must decide on their level of comfort for safety to eat together inside or wait until the weather warms to resume meals outside in the Spring. Caution is still required, but it is good news that so many adults are getting their boosters.

When the groups were formed, children under 18 could not get vaccinated and Circle Dinner Groups had no families with children participating. Now children five and older are getting vaccinated, so hopefully the future holds more participation from families with children.

Membership Directory: The Member Directory has been updated and is located in the members-only area of the Prairie website at uuprairie.org. Please let us know if your contact information has changed, so we can keep the directory current. The Members Only page requires a password, so please ask Dan Klock or Patty Stockdale for the password to view.

Member count: Our member count currently stands at 112. The Quorum for decision making requires 33.6 members.

Hospitality Committee Report

Barbara Chatterton Frye & Nancy Wunderlin, Hospitality Committee Co-Chairs

The hospitality committee is enthusiastically waiting for the 1st opportunity to serve coffee and to have a Soup Sunday!

Thank you so much to Al Nettleton, John Wunderlin, Nancy Wunderlin and Margit Moses for the wonderful contributions to getting our wonderful remodeled kitchen ready for action!



Program Committee Report

Renee Deschard, Program Committee Chair

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Voting Members: Renee Deschard (Chair), Ron Frye, Suzanne Gernandt, Barb Park, Robin Proud, Rick Ruecking, Nancy Wunderlin

Non Voting Members: Rev. Matt Aspin, Dan Klock

With declining covid19 numbers, Prairie started in person outdoor services in the Annex's backyard on June 13th 2021. We had many wonderful services including "Prairie Poetry" 6/13, "Prairie Music Reunion" 6/20, "Welcoming The Summer Solstice" 6/27 and "Small Group Discussion & BYO Picnic" 7/4. On 7/11 we had an intergenerational Sunday service/event which was "Neighborhood Trash/Recycling Pick Up".

Our first service inside our newly renovated (and permitted!!!) building was on 7/18 "Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America - Madison." The following week was our annual joint service with the Free Congregation of Sauk County with the theme of "Gratitude."

We happily welcomed our new minister (and his daughter) on 8/1 with a "Meet 'N Greet with Rev. Matt Aspin @ Mendota Park". On 9/12 we had our annual "Ingathering" service in person indoors. Unfortunately, increasing covid19 numbers meant that we returned to virtual services on 9/19 but we were able to have our annual "All Souls' Day" 10/31 and "Prairie Auction" 11/7 in person before returning online once again.

This fall a Music Committee formed as a new sub-committee within the Program Committee. Coordinating with the Program Committee, this committee helps make music selections, schedules musicians and accompanists, and is working towards the goal of providing a wide variety of music during Prairie's services.

Our new reality is likely switching between virtual and in person services (with a virtual viewing option) as covid19 numbers fluctuate, so please see our website, Facebook and Prairie News listserv for updates (contact Dan at admin@uuprairie.org to be added to the Prairie News listserv.)

Penny Eiler stepped down from the committee and we wanted to thank her for all of her time spent on the Program Committee. We thank all of our Prairie presiders, presenters, coordinators, readers, program assistants, musicians, tech & Zoom helpers who make our services so wonderful!



Rick Ruecking shared poetry at the 6/13/21 service. Picture taken by Renee Deschard.