

Prairie Fire

December
2022



Music Committee members Nancy Wunderlin (left) and Dan Proud (middle standing), choir accompanist Carl Wacker (middle seated), and choir director Barb Park (right) pose with Prairie's new piano. For more about our new piano, see page 8.
Photo credit: John Wunderlin

Prairie Contacts

The Reverend Matt Aspin, Minister -
minister@uuprairie.org
Kathy Converse, President -
president@uuprairie.org
Alice Mandt, Director of Religious Exploration -
dre@uuprairie.org
Dan Klock, Administrator -
admin@uuprairie.org
Pageen Manolis Small, Prairie Fire Editor -
prairiefire@uuprairie.org

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

Table of Contents

Calendar	2
Staff Office Hours	2
Words from the President	3
Widening the Circle	3
Minister's Musings	4
Religious Exploration	5
Social Action at Prairie	6
Prairie UUs the Vote	7
Friday Evening Meditation	7
Women of Wonder	8
New Piano	8
Fall Parish Meeting Reports	9-12



Calendar

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

2

Friday 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 (every Friday)

- 4:30p Dungeons and Dragons (online)
- 7:30p Meditation Group (for more about this group, see the article on page 7)

Saturday 3

- 10a WOW (Women of Wonder)

Sunday 4

- 10a Service: Widening the Circle
- 11:30a Soup Sunday

Sunday 11

- 10a Service: Old Befana by Ken Lonquist (intergenerational)

Sunday 18

- 10a Service: Symbol Tree by Prairie (intergenerational)

Saturday 24

- 10a Creativity and Connection (online)

Sunday 25

- 10a Service: Cozy Winter Brunch (intergenerational)

Office Hours

Rev. Matt Aspin's Office Hours:

Sun: In-person a minimum of 3 times per month. Available for meetings in the afternoon upon request.

Mon: Consistent in-person office day. Available for meetings upon request.

Tue-Thu: In office or working from home, depending on appointment schedule. Available for meetings upon request.

Administrator Dan Klock's Office Hours:

Mon-Fri 11:30am – 2:30pm

DRE Alice Mandt's Office Hours:

Mon: 3pm to 7pm

Wed: 3pm to 7pm

Thu: 3pm to 7pm

Fri: 3pm to 7pm



Photo credit: unsplash.com

Editor's note

Please contact the editor at proudfire@uuprairie.org if you would like to submit an article or photograph to the newsletter. Submissions are due by the 21st of each month for the next month's edition.

Words from the President

Kathy Converse, President



3

On November 8th, or before, a majority of us voted in our local and state elections. I assume as UUs we were guided by our 5th UU principle: the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and society at large.

Our Parish meeting was another example of democracy. Parish meetings remind me of being a child in Vermont and attending town meetings before elections. We are a smaller society, where every voice matters, and every voice is needed. The task of managing this space and creating the programs and activities presented here belongs to all of us. Our Minister, staff, Board, and committees are guided by your decisions. Although annual reports and by-laws may not be of much interest to you, your democratic approval of them is vital to their use as guidance in making Prairie decisions. We send out all Parish meeting materials in advance either by email or regular mail to ensure that you have a chance to participate.

No one should feel unheard or not included.... and if you do please tell us. Maybe a vote may not result as you wanted, but you hopefully got to state your opinion and understand any voting decisions that are made. To make Prairie more of what you want it to be, I encourage you to also “vote” by joining a committee, a circle dinner or other activity, volunteer in the RE program, request a class, teach a class, or help with an idea for a Sunday service. Using your ideas will help make Prairie a better fit for you and your family.

To quote Barack Obama: “The strongest democracies flourish from frequent and lively debate, but they endure when people of every background and belief find a way to set aside smaller differences in service of a greater purpose.”

WTCC Group Presents Lay Ministry

Mary Mullen

After the seven members of the Widening the Circle of Concern (WTCC) met for nearly a year in 2020 and submitted their recommendations to the Prairie Board, four members are now presenting a lay ministry on the subject of the WTCC report. The UUA report made many suggestions for how UUs can become more welcoming to people of marginalized identities including people of color, indigenous people, those with disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, and more.

The second service in the series will be presented on Sunday, December 4. Those attending will have a chance to react to an avatar’s statement of what is has



been like to be a religious person of color in UU churches. Members of the committee planning the lay ministry series are Katrina Thompson, Mary Mullen, Pageen Small, and Rebecca Strome (pictured left at their November 18 planning meeting). The other members of the committee were Anne Pryor, Katherine Liu, and Carolyn Schueppel.

Minister's Musings

Rev. Matt Aspin, Minister



4

Author Steven Covey used a metaphor where he described a group hacking their way through a dense jungle. One of the group decides to climb to the top of a tree to get a better perspective and shouts down, "Hey! We're going in the wrong direction!" to which the group shouts back in response, "Be quiet! We're making great progress!"

I usually try to use the writing of this monthly column as one of my moments to climb up from the day-to-day busyness of work and see if I can get a sense of where this community is headed, where things might be getting stuck, and making sure we're all pulling in the general direction we have collectively said we hope to go.

Two things I keep noticing when I stop to take these peeks from above are that there is both a lot of potential change on the horizon, AND we've all been dealing with A LOT of tumultuous change over the past few years. In the midst of all this change, the Board and I have been challenging you to evaluate if the Mission and Vision of our organization are still pointing us in the right direction. We're asking you to decide where we are going next as a congregation. Who do we want our existence to matter to? What do we want to be known for in this community?

All the while, the world seems to be hurtling forward faster and faster. World renowned futurist and author of the best-selling book "**The Singularity is Near**" **Ray Kurzweil** sees an exponential increase in the rate of change. If he's right, 20 years from now the rate of change will be 4x what it is today. Taken out a few more steps, his predictions would equate to an amount of change comparable to the last 20,000 years in the coming century.

All of which is to say...if you're feeling overwhelmed, you are not alone. We've just navigated a global pandemic. You renovated a building and hired your first full-time minister. We just made it through a mid-term election that many worried could have ignited the powder keg of pent-up frustration on the right side of the political spectrum. War in the Ukraine continues to impact us all. Elon Musk has blown up Twitter in less than a month. Racial justice, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia and classism continues to harm all of us. Yet another mass shooting this week targeted some of our most marginalized beloveds. Many in this community have been navigating heavy personal crises within their families.

Some in our community may feel like things are changing way too fast. Others feel like we're not moving nearly fast enough to address many important issues that are creating unsustainable rifts in the fabric of our society. And the truth is all of these perspectives hold value. Together, we can do more, dream bigger, and hold one another through these challenging times. As we prepare to enter the holiday season (a time of year that is often fraught with additional stress and expectation), it's also the time of year when many cultural traditions remind us to take a moment to reflect upon the many blessings in our lives. The intentional practice of slowing down, even for just a moment, and remembering to look anew at the wonders of the world around us is a spiritual practice that can serve as an antidote for the dizzying pace of change we are all experiencing.

Our ancestors had perspective and shared what they could see from above the trees. They knew that there is a time and a season for everything. The world will keep spinning. There is so much work to do. Why not commit to putting few things down in the coming month as we ready ourselves for whatever change is inevitably coming our way next?

Religious Exploration

5

Prairie children spend a lot of time in their outdoor classroom. On October 30, they enjoyed several Fall-themed games and activities, and many were dressed in Halloween costumes.

Photo credit: Andrea Keyser.



Religious Exploration Calendar

December

- 12/4 - Nifty Gifty (Children make craft gifts for friends and family using simple materials, assisted by some of our more artistic members).
- 12/11- Old Befana- Multigenerational Service
- 12/18 - Symbol Tree Multigenerational Service
- 12/25 - Multigenerational Potluck & Party

Social Action at Prairie

Molly Plunkett, Social Action Committee

6

Allied Partners

Allied Partners is a group of churches that meet monthly to support the Allied neighborhood. Prairie has been represented on the board of directors for many years. Other churches include First Baptist, Good Shepherd, Bethany United Methodist, Westminster Presbyterian, Friends Society, and Glenwood Moravian Church among others with less consistent involvement. Meetings are usually attended by the Dane County Social Worker operating out of the Joining Forces for Families (JFF) neighborhood service office and staff of the Allied Wellness Center. Representatives of other local groups, such as the Allied Dunn's Marsh Neighborhood Association, the Boys and Girls Club, the Brotherhood Group, the Allied Drive Food Pantry, and local elected officials often attend.

The member churches make donations of volunteers' time or money to support events and activities in the neighborhood and fill needs. One standing fund provides funds to the JFF social worker to help people facing eviction or utility cutoffs. For many years the congregations regularly funded or prepared and served a monthly meeting and meal hosted by the neighborhood association. Prairie, with two other congregations, helped prepare and serve a popular Mexican themed meal complete with a band and dancing. (Thanks to Pam and Gary and Barb and Bob Park among Prairie helpers). In the past churches have donated gifts distributed by JFF for children at Christmas. Allied Partners sponsors a scholarship fund for any resident seeking post high school education or training. Until this year members of Allied Partners donated \$100 per month in gas cards and bus tickets to the Allied Wellness Center for dispersal to needy residents. Often a resident will attend a meeting to request funds for a specific project, such as a garden planter for the yard of a neighborhood crisis intervention center or a blow up bouncy house for a neighborhood festival. Recently Allied Partners submitted a letter to the City Licensing Board opposing a business in the area receiving a liquor license, as we were requested to do by neighbors.

Molly Plunkett has been the representative of social action to Allied Partners.

Allied Wellness Center

Allied Wellness Center (AWC) was created in 2004 as a holistic ministry resource for the neighborhood. For its first 18 years it had one half-time community health liaison who enlisted visiting nurses and nursing students for blood pressure checks, referrals or information and offered classes or diet and exercise groups to address health issues endemic to the neighborhood: diabetes and hypertension.

In the last few years the AWC funded a pilot program and then a certification program that has trained 10 women from the area to become Community Health Workers (CHW). CHW are paraprofessional health care providers who create an innovative way to connect residents of medically underserved areas with support and connections to the medical resources they need. In 2022 the city grant sources funding the agency changed its focus to put more focus on community outreach work. With new funding the AWC hired a full time manager and is in the process of filling two more positions. The CHW have been very active in vaccination clinics in the neighborhood and in food distribution during covid. For a year and a half AWC workers and volunteers have delivered boxes of fresh food (Allied Fresh) on a weekly basis to as many as 240 households. Lynn Currie and Pam Gates have volunteered with food delivery. On a regular basis AWC workers have also delivered personal and household care products to households.

Prairie UUs the Vote

Molly Plunkett, Social Action Committee

7

The Wisconsin Unitarian Universalist State Action Network (WUUSAN) was formed three years ago to coordinate social justice/action work among the 30 UU congregations in Wisconsin as well as to collaborate with state action networks in adjoining states and with the UUA. Board members represent congregations from around the state. This year WUUSAN was awarded a \$5,000 grant to work on UU The Vote campaign. Prairie was the base camp for the Wisconsin UU Weekend of Action with zoom presentations from the UUA coordinator and Susan Frederick Gray, plus phone and text banking on Oct. 15-16. Here are some outcome figures for action statewide:

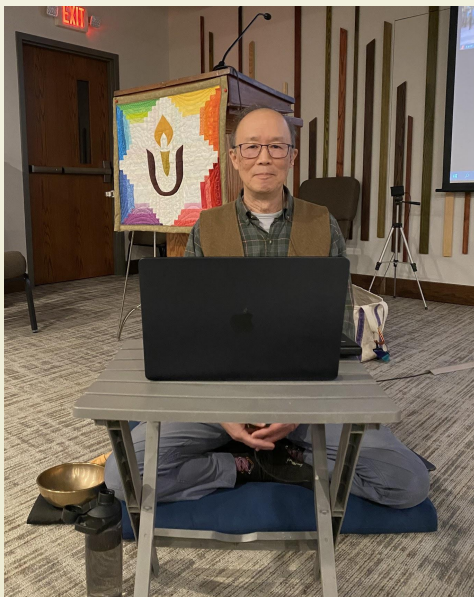
- ★ Volunteers ~ 450
- ★ Poll workers & Election protection ~ 60
- ★ Voters registered ~ 110
- ★ Face to face: Tabling/Doors/Lit ~ 3500
- ★ Phones ~ 3000 (300 reached)
- ★ Letters ~ 600
- ★ Texting ~ 50,000
- ★ Postcards ~ 7750
- ★ TOTAL VOTER OUTREACH ~ 65,000



Photo credit: unsplash.com

Friday Evening Meditation

Katrina Thompson



On Friday 18 November, Prairie began hosting [Madison Insight Meditation](#)'s Friday night sitting group. I've been sitting with Madison Insight on Friday nights for a little over a year now, but we haven't had a place to meet in person. At our first in-person meeting, nine Prairie members and friends attended, along with seven Madison Insight regulars. Most of us were in person and a few on zoom. Jayson Chung (pictured on left) gave a dharma talk on the purpose and basic methods of vipassana (insight) meditation, led us in a 25-minute sit, and then we had some time for discussion. We ended by "sharing the merit," sending out into the world whatever good came from our time together. It was a lovely beginning to what I hope will be an ongoing collaboration between two communities that are very meaningful to me.

Women of Wonder (WOW)

Mary Mullen

8

After a recent uptick in Covid within the Prairie community, the Prairie Women's Group (WOW) went back to holding its monthly meetings exclusively by Zoom to allow for community while maintaining safety. Many more women attended than when WOW was a hybrid of in-person and Zoom attendees for the past several months. The November 5 screenshot (below) shows Kathy Converse, Patty Stockdale, Mary Mullen, and Barbara Park in the first row: Kate Liu, Mary Frantz, and Sonya Sidky in the second; Anne Urbanski (in Santa Fe), Paula Pachciarz, Mary Somers (in Tucson) in the third; and Robin Proud in the fourth. WOW is open to Prairie women of any age. Friends of members are also welcome. WOW meets the first Saturday of each month at 10 am. The Zoom link is on the Prairie website.



New Piano

Nancy Wunderlin, Music Committee

We're excited to announce the new piano is in place at the Meeting House. Prairie purchased a used Kawai GM-10 to replace our previous piano that was over 100 years old and beyond repair. The old piano was removed and much of it will be recycled. We have some repairs planned for the key action on the new piano early next year to get into tip-top shape. This will be a wonderful instrument for Prairie for a long time. Thank you for your generous donations to make this purchase possible.

Report on the Prairie UU Fall Parish Meeting

Dan Proud, Board Secretary

9

The Fall 2022 Parish meeting at Prairie was a combined live and virtual event on November 20th following a shortened Sunday program. President Kathy Converse opened the meeting with a reflection on the practice of democracy, the fifth UU principle, which the gathering embodied.

Forty-one members were in attendance at Prairie and seven more were on the Zoom connection.

Five agenda items were acted upon:

1. The minutes of the May 22 nd Parish meeting were approved.
2. The 2023 budget was presented by Chris Porter and Suzanne Gernandt from the Finance Committee. The pledge drive is nearly completed: 40 pledges totaling 71% of the goal have been received. The budget totals are similar to the ones from the current year's budget, with the expectation that there will be no shortfall in income. Nevertheless, an amendment was added to allow for up to \$30,000 in reserves to be made available if needed in the next year. The budget with the amendment was approved.
3. The Ad Hoc Bylaws Committee, with Rachel Long reporting, delivered an updated set of bylaws that contained changes in three areas:
 - a. Officers and Board of Trustees (sections 6 and 7) were switched around, with minor editing
 - b. Committees and Nominations & Elections (sections 9 and 10) were switched around, with clarifications on the makeup and functions of the two committees
 - c. Editing throughout with simplified language for clarity.The bylaws changes were approved.
4. The Nominating Committee, with Rachel Long reporting, presented a new slate of members for the Committee on Ministry (COM), Ann Pryor, Katrina Thompson, and Barb Park, with newly defined rotating terms and term limits. The slate for the COM was approved. The Nominating Committee will distribute forms to the membership for interest in joining various committees.
5. Committee Updates were presented in handout form for Membership, Committee on Ministry, Finance, Housing and Property, Social Action, Program, Music, Nominating, Caring, Hospitality, and Archives.

The meeting was adjourned after one hour, at 11:24 a.m.

Editor's note

The Prairie Fire will spread the publication of the Fall Parish Meeting Committee Reports between the December and January editions of the newsletter.



Fall Parish Meeting Committee Reports

10

Nominating Committee Report

by Rachel Long

Committee members: Rachel Long (Chair,) Heidi Hughes, Paula Pachciarz, Kent Wenger
Since Prairie's Annual Meeting in May, the Nominating Committee has been busy with a number of things.

1. We nominated Anne Pryor to replace Mary Frantz on the Committee on Ministry.
2. We completed our procedures document to go into the Prairie Policies & Procedures Manual, bringing it into line with our expanded role per the new (proposed) Bylaws.
3. We sought and received agreement from our three Committee on Ministry members Anne Pryor, Barb Park, and Katrina Thompson to serve staggered terms starting after the Fall Parish Meeting.
4. We started a process of working with the Membership Committee to gather information about our members' skills and interests, so we can better match you to volunteer positions that both would both enrich our members (3rd principle) and meet the needs of our community.

Expect us to reach out to you at some point so we can explore together how we can help you grow and be of service!

Membership Committee Report

by Deesa Pence and Patty Stockdale

People involved on the Membership Committee are Deesa Pence as chair; Lynn Currie as liaison to the Board; others who are also on the Membership Committee are the Rev. Matt, Patty Stockdale, Judy Lazarus and Paula Pachciarz.

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. The link is posted on Prairie's website at uuprairie.org.

New Members and Newcomers: Periodically, we meet with folks who express interest in joining Prairie UU Society as members. For that purpose, we have prepared information folders for new members to take home to read and keep for future reference. The Membership Committee also prepared Visitor Folders available at the Welcoming Table for those who show a little more interest in Prairie UU after attending. The committee meets with them in person or on Zoom, if they desire, to find out more about the church and have any questions answered. In the future, the Membership Committee has decided to offer a Visitor or New Member Orientation the first Sunday of each month after the service, so newcomers and visitors can conveniently attend after Sunday services.

Pink Flamingos: Lazarus would like to get these birds moving again.

Visitor Follow-up: An effort should be made to contact visitors within 24 hours with a call, postcard and/or email.

New Equipment Discussion: Stockdale proposed that we use some of the unused money from our budget to enhance the Zoom experience for the Sunday Services. What we have now is inadequate. This connects to membership via promoting the goals of reaching out to members and improving their online experiences.

(reports continue on next page)

Fall Parish Meeting Committee Reports Cont'd

11

Membership Committee Report Cont'd.

Member count: Our member count currently stands at 108.

Membership Directory: The Member Directory continues to be 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.

Circle Dinner Groups: Each year in late summer and/or early fall, Prairie UU forms Circle Dinner Groups with those interested in sharing meals together. The Membership Committee did not plan new Circle Dinner Groups as hoped for in August because at the time, there was no chair, and only 2 members on the committee. This year, starting in October, we still had an enthusiastic response from Prairie's congregation. There are 48 adult members participating in the Circle Groups and 27 people on the Alternates list. The groups have been formed by Pachciarz and Pence, only needing the contact information to be added to each of the groups. This should be finished within the first week of November. The groups have intentionally been kept small, so as to accommodate more folks participating from the Alternates list.

Membership Committee meeting schedule: Will meet monthly at 10 am on the fourth Wednesday at the Annex. Pachciarz requested Zoom meetings, but others prefer in person meetings. We may revisit this idea, since 5 of the 6 people attending the last in person meeting came down with COVID as a result. The next meeting is November 23.

Committee on Ministry

Committee members: Katrina Daly Thompson (chair), Barb Park, Anne Pryor

In May 2022, the Committee on Ministry collected data from committees and members not on committees via a questionnaire. We used the data to write a report about Rev. Matt's ministry that we submitted to the Board in July and that they subsequently submitted to the UUA as part of his fellowship process.

The committee took a break because of summer travels and while waiting for a new committee member to join us after the upcoming parish meeting. In September 2022, Anne Pryor joined the committee and Mary Frantz finished her term. We thank Mary for her service to the committee and welcome Anne.

We have now returned to look at the questionnaire answers again, this time with the goal of assessing Prairie's larger ministry. We are almost finished with that work, and we plan to share feedback with the Board and with each committee shortly after the 20 November parish meeting. We will ask committees to address their responses to our feedback in each subsequent committee report.



Photo credit:
unsplash.com

(reports continue on next page)

Fall Parish Meeting Committee Reports Cont'd.

12

Finance Committee by Chris Porter, Chair

Prairie finances are in good shape at this time. We had more money on hand in August 2022 than we had in August 2021. This is because, on balance, we received contributions beyond what was budgeted in some areas and because expenses were less than some areas. The 2022 budget included a \$7500 contingency fund and using \$15,000 of reserves. Neither of these were necessary. Expenses for the rest of 2022 are running as expected and won't have a big impact on reserves.

Our budget for 2023 is very similar to the 2022 budget. We won't be drawing on designated minister reserves this year so our need for pledge income is significantly higher. The pledge goal is \$167,808, \$38,000 more than 2022. As of November 2, 2022, 23 pledges were received, totaling \$74,709. For 2022, there were 53 pledges. It is expected that many more pledges will be received but it is unclear if we will reach our goal. If we don't reach our pledge goal, the board and the congregation will have to consider where to trim the budget. An update on pledges will be provided at the Parish Meeting.

Housing and Property by Randy Converse, Chair

Activities since last Parish meeting:

- Created enclosure for meeting house HVAC unit - designed by John Gernant, built by John, John Wunderlin, Al Nettleton, Heidi Hughes, Gene Kain, Gary Gates, Randy Converse
- Kept outside and inside clean and welcoming: Raju
- Outside trim, fascia, and overhang of meeting house was repainted/refurbished by outside contractor, Naturally Refined Painting
- Kept the lights on and the AV and security equipment humming: John Wunderlin, Al Nettleton



Photo credit: unsplash.com