

# Prairie Fire

October  
2023



Prairie's retreat will be held at Bethel Horizons from September 29 to October 1.  
Photo credit: Angie Buelow on [bethelhorizons.org](https://bethelhorizons.org)

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## Prairie Contacts

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**Alice Mandt**, Director of Religious Exploration (through 9/30) - [dre@juuprairie.org](mailto:dre@juuprairie.org)

**Karen Deaton**, Director of Religious Exploration (starting 10/1) - [dre@juuprairie.org](mailto:dre@juuprairie.org)

**Nancy Wunderlin**, Administrator - [admin@juuprairie.org](mailto:admin@juuprairie.org)

**Pageen Manolis Small**, Prairie Fire Editor - [prairiefire@juuprairie.org](mailto:prairiefire@juuprairie.org)

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

# Calendar

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

## Sunday 1 Final day of annual retreat

- 10a Service: “Keylog Ceremony” by Prairie at Bethel Horizons

## Friday 6, 13, 20, 27 (every Friday)

- 4:30p Dungeons and Dragons (online)

## Saturday 7

- 8:30a Prairie and Reeb volunteers at the River Food Pantry (sign up w/ Pam Gates, Social Action co-chair)

## Sunday 8

- 10a Service by Rev. Ralph
- 11:30a PUUPs
- 11:30a Visitor Orientation

## Saturday 14

- 1p Game Group

## Sunday 15

- 10a Service: “Deciding What’s True in a Polarized Society” by Michael Wagner
- 12p Interweave

## Tuesday 17

- 6:30p Board Meeting

## Thursday 19

- 7p Guys Group

## Sunday 22

- 10a Service: “Killers of the Flower Moon” by Michele Clark

## Saturday 28

- 10a Creativity and Connection (online)

## Sunday 29

- 10a Service: “All Souls Day”

## Office Hours

### Administrator Nancy Wunderlin:

Sun-Tue: on site in the Annex

Wed-Fri: working remotely

### Pastoral Care, Rev. Ralph Tyksinski

Tues and Wed: on site in the Annex.

Available for in-person meetings upon request.

### Editor’s note

Please contact the editor at [prairiefire\[at\]uuprairie.org](mailto:prairiefire[at]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.

### Director of Religious Exploration

**Alice Mandt (through Sept 30):**

Mon, Wed, Thu, Fri 3pm to 7pm

**Karen Deaton (starting Oct 1):**

Mon, Wed, Fri, Sunday 9am to 12pm

# Words from the President

Kathy Converse, President

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One of our current priorities is to revisit Prairie's mission and vision statements, which were last reviewed and revised in 2000. They are located on our web site under Home, About. Or you can navigate to <https://uuprairie.org/about/>. I am asking all of you to either read them again or perhaps for the first time. Do you think they truly describe what you see and feel as our mission and vision? Maybe they can stand as is, or maybe you feel something needs to be added or subtracted. If you have comments or any suggested changes send to me and we will start reviewing them this fall. We will include comments from many of you that were collected two years ago at our retreat.



## Social Action Committee News

Pam Gates, Social Action Committee Co-chair

The committee met on Sept. 17, with 5 members present. We agreed we'd continue our focus on homelessness for our shared offerings, continue at The River Food Pantry, and try for an after-service MOSES letter-writing project soon.

In other MOSES news, a current focus is preparation for a rally at the state Capitol on Tuesday, Oct. 10, 12-1 p.m., to draw more attention to the ongoing lockdowns at the Waupun and Green Bay state prisons. Officials call it "modified movement," but, due to staffing shortages, people are basically locked in their cells 23 hours/day, get showers once/week, etc. That boils down to solitary confinement, which the U.N. defines as torture when continued for more than 15 days. It has been going on at Waupun and Green Bay, and likely more state prisons, since March. Wisconsin made the [front page of the New York Times](#) for this situation; the lengthy article was reprinted on the *Wisconsin State Journal's* front page on Sunday, Aug. 20.

Several MOSES members, including myself, testified at a hearing before the state Supreme Court on Sept. 7. Legal Action of Wisconsin had petitioned the Court to erase eviction records in which there is no money judgement after one year. Currently, they are held for 20 years. The hearing room was packed, with speakers on both sides of the issue. MOSES works on housing issues and school issues, such as dyslexia, trying to dismantle the childhood-to-school-to-prison pipeline. The eviction hearing was one such effort; testifying before the Legislature on education bills has been another recent endeavor. (Reading difficulties are present in much of the prison population; 71% of that population has been found to be functionally illiterate.)

I write book reviews on relevant books, which we publish in the [MOSES bimonthly newsletters](#). You can find the reviews there (hard copies of the current newsletter can be found in Prairie's lobby), and Pageen has said she will reprint them in the *Prairie Fire* – as soon as I get around to submitting them!

MOSES will hold its [annual Gala on Dec. 9](#), at which it will honor, as it does every year, three people who have turned their lives around after incarceration. It would be wonderful to have some people from Prairie join me this year for this fun and inspiring event.



# What's Going on in Religious Exploration?

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**Karen Deaton**, soon-to-be Director of Religious Exploration



## **Thank you Alice Mandt**

As many of you know, our Director of Religious Exploration (DRE) Alice Mandt is resigning to go back to school. Over the last two and a half years, Alice has provided a nurturing, supportive environment for our families during the challenges of the pandemic. She has brought to her work for our congregation a deep commitment to Unitarian Universalism. I'm sure her big heart and thoughtful insights will help her make a positive impact wherever her path leads her in the future. Please join me and the RE Committee in wishing Alice success in her academic endeavors. The relationship Prairie has formed with this remarkable young woman means that Alice plans to stay involved at Prairie as a member and volunteer!

Our retreat will be Alice's final weekend as DRE. Who will oversee RE after that? I will, for a while. Prairie's Board has hired me to serve as part-time interim DRE, beginning in October. I will serve in this role for a few months while the Transition Committee helps the congregation clarify our staffing priorities and needs.

## **Religious Exploration Starts a New Year**

On September 17, our new RE year began and three peer-group classes met for the first time:

- Carl W and Randy C bring considerable experience as teachers to the 3-to-6-year-old class. The enthusiastic youngsters in this class will share simple rituals and fun activities during their time together (they squeezed lemons and made lemonade in their first meeting!) *This teaching team needs one more person to join them as a helper once or twice a month. It's a great opportunity to get to know some sweet children*
- Michele C, Alice M, and I (Karen D) will lead a class for 7-to-9-year-olds where we'll talk about the many ways we're all connected while we indulge our creativity in all kinds of craft projects (many using found items) and play some cooperative games
- Tim S, Robin P, and Casey S will dig into tabletop RPG (Role Playing Games, similar to Dungeons & Dragons) with ages 10 and up. Youngsters in this group will create imaginary adventures together in an environment that allows them to create their own characters and make decisions together. New players are always welcome

Our child care worker Ollie and frequent volunteer Jesse will look after infants and toddlers during choir rehearsal and services. Our RE Committee Chair Andrea Keyser Scott will be a floater/sub for the RE classes.

(continued on next page)

# Religious Exploration cont'd

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## What's Next in RE

October 1 - No RE activities at the Meeting House because we'll be at Bethel Horizons for Prairie's retreat

October 8 - Cooking Day! The day before Indigenous Peoples' Day, all our young people will work together to prepare some traditional American Indian food. We'll share the food (along with pizza) at our PUUPs (Prairie UU Parents) meeting after the service.

October 15 and 22 - Peer group classes, as described above

October 29 - Halloween party! Yes, there will be candy. Kids can show off their Halloween costumes, play games, do crafts, and collect prizes

November 5 - Cooking Day! All ages of children and youth will be together, cooking food for Prairie's monthly potluck

## How You Can Help our Program

- Volunteer as a teacher's helper in RE
- Halloween Party - Bring Trick-or-Treat goodies to Prairie on October 29 and hand them out to children before the service. Admire their costumes.
- Donate good-condition books and toys to be prizes at our Halloween party.
- Provide child care during PUUPs meetings the second Sunday of each month, after the service
- Contact me or members of the RE committee (Andrea S, Carl W, and Marie A) with ideas for RE service projects and other activities



Above and right: RE students, staff, and volunteers enjoy time at the park with games, art, and free play.  
Photo credit: Andrea Keyser Scott.





# Remembering Marilyn Ruecking

Mary Mullen

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Although at Prairie we knew that Marilyn Ruecking signed up for hospice near the end of May, it was still a shock to learn from Rev. Ralph Tyksinski of her death on September 9. She had been at the Sunday service just a week or two before. The most recent photo in our archives is from the July 9 Flower Ceremony.

A few of us old-timers would readily recall how active she was in Prairie since joining as Marilyn Peters on June 13, 1993. It was a year after the death of her first husband. Interestingly, her first contact with Prairie involved her to-be second husband, Rick Ruecking. In her story of how she came to Prairie, she says, “I called Prairie UU at 2 p.m. on a Sunday, 1993. Rick Ruecking answered the phone and gave me good directions to get there. I was so glad I reached someone that late in the afternoon. The following Sunday, I arrived.” Read more of that fascinating story on page 705 of Volume 2 of Prairie’s History Book set.



One of the first hints of Marilyn’s contributions to Prairie is a notice in the January 28, 1997, issue of the Prairie Fire where she invited people to the first meeting of a “Caring Committee.” Twenty-six years later The Caring Committee is still doing its work of supporting Prairie members in need. Marilyn was its first chair, serving until 2001. She participated on the committee until late 2005.

Marilyn also held another job of great importance to Prairie: that of Administrator and Prairie Fire editor, starting in March 2000 and continuing through February 2002.

Marilyn took on other roles as a member of the Committee on Committees (Nominating Committee), as a lay minister with others, “Hunting for Hope” and with different people on “Healthy Congregations and Conflict”, as chair of the Ceremonies Committee, and as co-chair of the Long Range Planning Committee.

Marilyn was clearly a caring person as shown by her official activities. But the named roles only scratch the surface of her involvement with Prairie as noted in our archives. But she was also much more than these in-print references. She was a gracious conversationalist. She loved social activities, particularly movies. Like several other members – notably Barbara Park and Barbara Chatterton Frye – her growing up was in New York.

Her memorial service will be held at Prairie on Saturday, October 28 at 2pm.

You may also wish to join the meal train for Rick Ruecking at

<https://www.mealtrain.com/trains/wd9m57>



Top right: Marilyn at Prairie’s 50th Anniversary celebration on 9/17/17.  
Far left: Marilyn on 9/5/04.  
Near left: Marilyn (far right) at Anne Pryor’s service auction event, with (L to R) husband Rick, Erin Bosch, Anne Pryor, and Lynn Currie on 7/24/22  
Photo credit: Mary Mullen

# 2024 Pledge Drive

Chris Porter, Finance Committee Chair

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The 2024 Prairie pledge drive is under way. We have set a pledge goal of \$144,500. This is the amount we received in pledge commitments for 2023. The total budget, as requested by committees at this time is \$189,700. This is \$15,000 less than 2023. Prairie takes seriously the responsibility to manage the contributions of our members.

## Budget highlights:

- We project income to be about \$2000 higher.
- In 2023, we had allowed for using up to \$30,000 of reserves. We will not use reserves for 2023.
- The 2024 budget includes \$7000 to paint the exterior of the annex. This reasonably should be considered a capital expenditure and paid out of reserves. At this time, we are not planning to use reserves.
- We are budgeting for a half-time minister for July through December 2024. In addition, we will have Reverend Ralph's help before that.
- The RE budget currently includes a \$1000 increase, primarily to cover RE Soup Sunday efforts and to pay for PUUPS snacks.
- Administrative fees are higher, primarily related to fees for Breeze and new auction software.
- The program committee has budgeted an additional \$1500 for Sunday service speakers because we don't have a minister.
- Payroll expenses are projected to increase \$5500.
- Our August 2023 bank balance was \$1500 less than August 2022. Overall, Prairie's reserve funds remain very strong.

Fundraising note: 26% of our pledge dollars come from three pledges. Prairie can't rely on these three pledges long term.

So, after all the dry number crunching, I want to ask you for your support. Every pledge is important to Prairie. Every pledge helps fund the items listed above and our base budget, but more importantly, your pledge helps us thrive as a community. We learn, we educate, we support, we get involved, we care.

I would very much appreciate receiving your pledge by October 5, 2023, so we can submit a solid budget to the board in preparation for the parish meeting.

Photo credit:  
Towfiqu barbhuiya on  
[unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)

