

Prairie Fire

December
2023



Photo credit: Ravi Piniseti via unsplash.com

Table of Contents

Calendar	2
Staff Office Hours	2
Words from the President	3
Donations Needed for Nifty Gifty	3
What “Pastoral Care” Means to Me	4
What’s Going on in Religious Exploration?	6
Two Founding Members Pass On	7
Remembering K.K. Anderson	8



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

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Calendar

2

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

Saturday 2

- 8:30a Prairie and Reeb volunteers at the River Food Pantry (sign up w/ Pam Gates, Social Action co-chair)
- 10a Women of Wonder (WOW)

Sunday 3

- 10a "Humanism: In Command or In Crisis?" by Michael Schuler
- 11:30a Potluck Sunday

Sunday 10

- 10a "I Can Tolerate Anything Except the Outgroup" by Matt Wise
- 11:30a PUUPs
- 11:30a Visitor Orientation

Saturday 16

- 1p Games group

Sunday 17

- 10a Symbol Tree by Prairie
- 12p Interweave

Tuesday 19

- 6:30p Board Meeting

Thursday 21

- 7p Guys Group

Sunday 24

- 10a "Christmas in the Trenches" by Rev. Ralph

Monday 25

- 10a Cozy Winter Brunch

Sunday 31

- 10a Service

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.

Director of Religious Exploration Karen

Deaton:

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



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.

Words from the President

Kathy Converse, President



3

Many people don't like sending holiday letters. I send letters so that I receive letters back. I enjoy curling up on the couch reading from my basket of cards and letters. I leave the basket around for months. These stories on paper are readily available and don't get lost in email or facebook. I write to family, former fellow graduate students, coworkers and neighbors. Our letters and pictures travel from Maine to California, Vermont to Florida, and Texas to Alaska.



Our letters allowed us to journey together through decades of education, managing careers, relationships, having children, and grandchildren. As we age, letters also become a more fragile and precious web of friendship.

Kathy's basket of 2022 letters.
Photo credit: Kathy Converse

Donations Needed for Nifty Gifty

Supplies: If you have any of these things on hand and you don't plan to use them, please bring them to Prairie on December 3 and put them in the donation box that you'll find outside our Meeting Room. If you have items to donate but can't bring them in person, contact Karen ([dre\[at\]uuprairie.org](mailto:dre[at]uuprairie.org)) to arrange a pickup.

- Pretty or interesting paper (but not as heavy as greeting cards or calendars):
- Paper maps
- Old seed catalogs
- Travel magazines
- Colorful paper napkins
- Origami paper
- Scrapbook paper
- Velcro
- Hot Glue Sticks (the clear mini or standard ones, not the opaque 10" long industrial ones)
- Jars from Yoplait Oui yogurt
- Jigsaw puzzle pieces (such as from puzzles that have missing pieces)
- Little things to decorate gifts and wrapping such as sequins, glitter, stickers, or buttons.

Treats: We also appreciate treats to fuel crafting children and helpers. Sealed packages can be dropped off on December 3, or you can bring fresh items on December 10 (please let Karen know if you're planning to bring something):

- Mandarin oranges
- Cheese sticks
- Pretzels or chips
- Cookies

What “Pastoral Care” Means for Me as Prairie’s Pastoral Care Minister

Rev. Ralph Tyksinski, Minister

4

The liberal minister, if they have understood and mastered their own diffidence when it comes to dealing with people at deep emotional levels, will know how to bridge this distance with persons facing a deeply unsettling experience. It is a skill set that I have learned during my experience and training as minister in other congregations and as a chaplain. It is a skill set that requires considerable patience, persistence, and, above all, sincerity and genuine concern. It also requires knowing when and how to refer a member for professional counseling and medical treatment.

It is well referenced that many of the members in a liberal church are genuinely interested in their spirituality and are eager to talk about it. Since religious beliefs are no longer in a special category where doubt and questioning are forbidden, they can be discussed freely in the same way that anything else can be discussed. In general, people are more ready to discuss religious/spiritual questions than their own personal problems and perplexities. They tend to be more reticent about their personal difficulties, and when they are led by severe pressures to discuss their problems with their minister they are apt to apologize about doing so: "I hate to bother you with this," or "I ought to be able to handle this myself but ... -

This brings the UU minister to the heart of a problem that many in the congregation may have experienced. Many UUs have abandoned a faith in a supernatural god and in the various symbolic and mystical dimensions of former religious teachings and practices and have come to believe or professes to believe, in a more rational, naturalistic and humanistic views of life.

In acknowledging this wider variety of views and perspectives on living a meaningful life a newer understanding of pastoral care emerges.

We begin with a description of a UU typically as one who has come to embrace and practice a sense of freedom to live as a rational being fully capable to put one’s own life in order, independent of theistic belief, making and carrying through the necessary conscious decisions that are required to solve our own individual problems. However, a dilemma begins to become apparent for many as we begin to understand that we live our lives not only at the conscious, rational level but also at the unconscious, emotional level as well. But as we begin acknowledging this fact a fear may become more evident. This is to say, will we begin to fear losing our liberalism and will we begin to become enmeshed in sentimental, emotional, supernatural or family learned traditional views of life that will make it impossible for us maintain our ability to think clearly and freely?

The UU minister's pastoral care task often becomes that of helping persons accept the emotional-instinctive part of their human nature and to realize that in so doing they need not sacrifice reason and their adoptive and growing liberal perspectives. A purely rational religion is inevitably an incomplete religion, since so much of life is lived at the unconscious level and so many of our decisions have emotional as well as rational sources and overtones. We see this in the ways our prejudices around race, gender, age, ethnicity, economic status, social class, religion,

(continued on next page)

“Pastoral Care” cont’d

Rev. Ralph Tyksinski, Minister

5

etc., affect our opinions and actions. Once a more complete and wholistic view of human nature and behavior has been accepted and incorporated into liberal religious thought, it will make room for the attitudes of warmth and feeling which are often lacking in the worship and group life of the UU congregation.

This view will also make room for commitment, not to the dogmatic beliefs of the past, but to the living and unfolding purposes of religion in the world today. Far from being a limiting and confining experience, genuine commitment is a liberating and exhilarating experience. It sets one free from the aimless and the trivial and from the frustration and boredom of the merely novel. The temptation to become a religious dilettante is a great one in the liberal church and must be resisted, since mere freedom is not sufficient ground for a healthy religion.

The task of the UU minister as pastoral care provider is to serve as guide for each person to become part of a continuing quest, a journey toward self-discovery and toward heightened meaning and purpose in the world. We cannot offer our congregants safety in this world or salvation in the next. We can offer the support and strength that come with giving ourselves to the service of creative ethical values in this world. This is not an easy matter, and the minister tries to be available and as a presence to offer the kind of caring and understanding that enables one to be more completely human in our actual lived experience.

Such situations can include:

- End-of-life care, decision making
- Preparing an Advance Directive for health care
- Planning a Memorial Service
- Serving as officiant for a Memorial Service
- Visiting homebound, sick, hospitalized members
- Visiting members in Hospice, Palliative Care
- Counseling those experiencing grief and loss of loved ones
- Counseling victims of Trauma
- Counseling one facing difficult personal, moral, ethical, spiritual decisions
- Serious Illness/Injury
- Isolation
- Caregiver Support
- New baby/child in the Family
- A child’s developmental challenges
- Depression
- Grieving
- Employment or financial issues
- Losses accompanying aging
- Caregiving needs and concerns

Prairie is a caring community. Our congregation is not so much a haven of comfort and safety, but rather a community that supports and cares for each member to pursue their continuing search and quest for life's meaning.

The minister's task is to provoke thought and the spirit of discovery rather than to provide simplistic answers. To sum up, to be an authentic caring presence is a vital part of the pastoral care ministry I bring to the lives of each member of Prairie UU Society.

What's Going on in Religious Exploration?

Karen Deaton, Director of Religious Exploration



The Holidays are Coming!

This time of year is rich in traditions at Prairie, especially traditions involving our children. Here are our plans for the festive month of December:

- December 3 - We'll learn about Hanukkah, which starts a few days later, and we'll prepare a treat to share at the potluck. Prairie adults who grew up celebrating Hanukkah are invited to join us (let me know if you'd like to be involved!)
- December 10 - Nifty Gifty! Children are invited to spend the morning crafting gifts for loved ones in a festive atmosphere. (Let me know if you'd like to help out!)
- December 17 - our intergenerational Symbol Tree service opens with a candlelight procession of our children. Then we are all invited to hang an item on our holiday tree - any item that symbolizes something important in our lives this year - and tell a little about it
- December 21 - Thursday, 6:00 to 7:30 pm - Solstice Bonfire in Prairie's back yard. Bring lawn chairs. We'll have cocoa to drink and marshmallows to toast
- December 24 - We all know about secular Christmas - Santa and Christmas trees. On this day, we'll get acquainted with the Christian Christmas story. Then we'll make popcorn - we'll eat some and string some. The congregation from James Reeb is invited to join us this Sunday.
- December 31 - RE programming to be determined

In January, we'll resume age-grouped classes. We'll also resume OWL (Our Whole Lives) programming, which offers comprehensive, accurate information about human sexuality for children and adults.

How You Can Help our Program

- Contact me or members of the RE committee (Andrea S, Carl W, and Marie A) with ideas for RE service projects and other activities
- Lead or help with a craft project for our December 10 crafting extravaganza - Nifty Gifty
- Read the emails I send out requesting volunteers to help with child care during meetings and special events and consider helping!

Contact me if you are interested in volunteering in any way!



Two Founding Members Pass On – In California

Mary Mullen

7

On January 28 of this year, Barbara James (formerly Barbara Willard) died. Then on July 31, her husband, Joe Laurence passed on. They had been living in Carmel Valley, CA, under the care of Joe's son, Jeff. Barbara was 85; Joe was 88. Both were founding members of Prairie in 1967 when they were married to other people who were also Prairie members. Both contributed to Prairie with their musical talents, as members of the Prairie Chicken Pluckers bluegrass group in the early 1970s, and later more generally for special music. For example, Barbara wrote humorous lyrics to a song she called "Pledgehammer's Anthem" that was sung at the Prairie retreat in 1987. It was to raise money for the remodeling that changed the entrance of Prairie from Whenona Drive to Crawford Drive. Both Barbara and Joe were members of a recorder group that performed at Prairie services in the 1980s and on.

Of the two, Barbara was the most active in the official spheres of Prairie life. She was a lay minister in three different decades, the 70s, 80s, and 90s. That was the time when a lay minister did up to a dozen services in a year, often in a 3-month stretch. She also served a term as President and a year as the *Prairie Fire* Editor.

Barbara was also by far the most outspoken of the two, both in person and in her writing. Samples of her writing as well as her opinions are well worth reading on pages 33 and 746 of the Prairie history book set.

It was Barbara's skill as an attorney that helped other Prairie members whose daughter died very young in a car accident. The family buried her on her brother's farm. That scandalized some of the neighbors. They brought a lawsuit which might have resulted in exhumation of the body. Barbara was one of the attorneys of record that won the case in Federal District Court. Read about that case on page 490 the history book.

A joint obituary can be accessed on the Prairie archives in the church year each died: <http://archives.uuprairie.org/chronology/index.htm>. Our online archivist Bob Park also found a 2008 interview with Barbara in the Monterey County Weekly where she recalls being a "Child of a Dark Era." During the communist-hunting McCarthy years of the 1950s, her parents were called before the House Un-American Activities Committee and were blacklisted. See that interview at www.montereycountyweekly.com

I personally knew Barbara when she and I worked at the Public Service Commission. There each year she spearheaded a musical called "Elm Farm Ollie," about a cow that was flown and milked in an airplane that dropped cartons of her milk to the people below. Barbara recruited employees of the PSC to sing and dance. I participated in that. Believe it or not this musical was based on a real event. Check out the internet.



Joe Laurence, Al Nettleton, Barbara James, Warren Hagstrom, and Doleta Chapru Joe playing recorders with the second incarnation of the Prairie recorder group, probably in the mid-80s-1990s. Photo courtesy of Ruth Calden.

Remembering K.K. (Karen K.) Anderson

Mary Mullen

8

We have recently learned of the death of another Prairie member, K.K. Anderson, a resident of Madison, and a Prairie member since 1971.

K.K. was an active member of Prairie until about the time of the start of the pandemic. In the past she participated on the Prairie Board as Secretary, November 1998-2002, and then again, 2003-2004. She was the Vice President from 2004-2007. In addition, she served on the Nominating Committee, then called the Committee on Committees, for four different terms between 1999 and 2007.



Besides her participation in the administrative life of Prairie and her infectious smile, I remember her for two other things. For years, she faithfully brought her two granddaughters Xena and Valerie Anderson to Prairie Religious Education (as it was called then), and she was a very ambitious bicyclist, often taking part in group rides with itineraries of hundreds of miles in this state and others.

When an obituary is prepared, it will be noted in the online Prairie chronology. K.K.'s husband Ed Kolner died in December 2022.



Above right: K.K. Anderson. Photo credit: Mary Mullen.
Left: K.K. (center) with granddaughters Xena (with cat) and Valerie (far right) and their parents Julia and Jeff Anderson. Photo credit: Xena Zupan.
Below left: Bicyclist K.K. Photo credit: Xena Zupan.
Below right: K.K. (center) with her two granddaughters Valerie and Xena. Photo credit: Xena Zupan.

