

Prairie Fire

February
2024



Photo credit: Ray Hennessy on unsplash.com

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

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Calendar

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

Saturday 3

- 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 4

- 10a "Catherine Spence: Australian Activist" by Robin Proud
- 11:30a Potluck Sunday

Sunday 11

- 10a Vica Etta Steel
- 11:30a PUUPs
- 11:30a Visitor Orientation (Annex)
- 12:15p Prairie Leadership Forum

Thursday 15

- 7p Guys Group

Saturday 17

- 1p Game Group

Sunday 18

- 10a Porchlight by Karla Thennes
- 12p Interweave (Annex)

Tuesday 20

- 6:30p Board Meeting

Sunday 25

- 10a "Political Dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" by Nadav Shelef

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.



Photo credit: Sonja Langford on unsplash.com

Words from the President

Kathy Converse, President

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Almost every day I read or witness caring words, and by so many people. However, within the same time frame I hear or witness words and actions painfully mean spirited. I know people who are in failing health and had friends that recently died. We also hear of people improving from illness miraculously. This weekend I listened to a newer acquaintance talk about depression in her and her husband and the struggle to eat, sleep, work and manage a home.

Everyone needs a place they feel safe to express themselves and hopefully find support and a new direction to follow. Maybe the most important role PUU plays in our community is a safe, accepting and secure haven for us to test our beliefs and listen to and support others. Together, we can hopefully help individuals choose the best path for them to follow.



Thank You from the Editor

Pageen Manolis Small, Outgoing Editor

This is my final edition as the *Prairie Fire* editor. Thank you to everyone who has submitted content, assisted with publication and distribution, offered suggestions, given feedback, and read the *Fire*. I have so enjoyed working on this newsletter. Please give a warm welcome to our new editor, who will be announced soon.



Photo credit: Mara Ket on unsplash.com



PrairieUU
Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society

What's Going on in Religious Exploration?

Karen Deaton, Director of Religious Exploration



After all our festive activities during the holidays and a snow day on January 14, we resumed our age-group classes on January 21, with a few adjustments to our age groupings.

- Children up through age 6 have fun with Carl, Randy, and Carleen. They are learning a sung version of our UU principles, which they may perform upstairs later in the year.
- Our Whole Lives (OWL) workshops are happening in the Annex for 7 and 8 year olds. OWL for this age group answers questions about bodies and babies, while encouraging frank discussions at home and celebrating the beautiful diversity we see in bodies and family structures. Casey, Matt, and I are the facilitators.
- Young people age 9 and up are meeting in our new Gaming Room downstairs in the Meeting House to play an imaginative, collaborative game with Tim.

Calendar notes

We'll have an all-ages cooking day on February 4, to prepare a treat to share at the potluck that day. All the other Sundays in February will have age-group classes as described above.

No PUUPs meeting in February. Prairie UU Parents group (PUUPs) usually meets after the service on the second Sunday of the month; however, several parents serve on the Board or on committees and will be attending the quarterly leadership meeting that day.

We need more OWL facilitators!

It's wonderful to learn to talk to our young people in a positive, realistic, accurate way about relationships, gender, and sex. You can make a real difference in children's lives by becoming a facilitator and leading workshops at Prairie. Please contact me if you might be willing to attend facilitator training either in person or online.



Photo credit: Markus Spiske on unsplash.com

Prairie Loses Three Members

Mary Mullen

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New members of Prairie may never have met the three Prairie members who have died since late November 2023, but they live on in the memories of those of us who knew them. Douglas Cook, 69, a member who hadn't attended for a number of years due to ill health, died on November 21, 2023. Elinor Loucks, a founding member, 90, died on December 2, 2023. Most recently Darrah Chavey, 69, a newer member who hadn't started attending again since being a frequent attendee before COVID hit, died on January 6. Their pictures and links to their obituaries have all been added to the online Prairie Chronology: <http://archives.uuprairie.org/chronology/index.htm> We encourage you to learn more about them from their obituaries. We extend our deepest sympathy to their loved ones and friends.

Here are a few words about each of them:



Doug Cook and Cynthia O'Neill, 11/9/23. Photo provided by Cynthia.

Doug Cook and his partner Cynthia O'Neill joined Prairie on July 31, 2017, and attended regularly for some time. I remember Doug as a very pleasant man and a good conversationalist. Cindy was his devoted partner of 30 years.

His long life was a sort of miracle. His obituary notes that he "was born with Tetralogy of Fallot, a heart defect that required open-heart surgery in 1960, when he was about 6, and again in 2002. Due to his being one of the first patients at the University of Iowa Hospital to have open-heart surgery with a heart-lung bypass, he became a poster child for the American Heart Association in Iowa as a child... He refused to let his health issues define him and became one of the longest-lived patients with Tetralogy of Fallot to have undergone open-heart surgery." A Celebration of Life will be held on August 10, 2024. Contact Cindy at [cmoneill09\[at\]yahoo.com](mailto:cmoneill09[at]yahoo.com) if you would like to receive updates.

Elinor Loucks and her husband Orie helped to found Prairie, joining at the very beginning in 1967 and participating actively until they moved away in 1978 as Orie pursued his career as an ecologist and university professor. She was a member of the earliest Prairie book club – for women – called the Val-Gals. That book club persisted until the 2020s although it was no longer associated specifically with Prairie and took on the name The Wednesday Bookies. She also participated in the Playreaders group that began in 1971. Elinor was Prairie's Executive Secretary from September 1969 until July 1971, the time when the newsletter became a regular thing. It was at first produced on a ditto machine, and a few months later by typewriter and mimeograph machine. It was her job as the secretary to produce and mail the newsletter, which she did from a corner of their basement. When the Prairie history was being written in 2016 and 2017, she very helpfully provided us with newsletters and other documents from those beginning years. In the early years she also served on the Committee on Committees – now called the Nominating Committee – for a term in 1974-75.



One of three photos of Elinor Loucks from her obituary page.

(continued on next page)

Prairie Losses cont'd.

Mary Mullen

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Elinor and Orié returned in 2015, and we would see them occasionally at Prairie. One occasion was the Octogenarian Near-Thanksgiving Dinner in November 2015, and another was the release of the Prairie history book set in April 2019. Be sure to go to our archives, mentioned above, to find Elinor's obituary which tells much, much more about her accomplishments. Elinor's memorial service will be held at Prairie on Saturday, February 3, 2024, at 2:00 pm, and will be on Zoom as well as in person.

Elinor Loucks (back row, third from left) at the Octogenarian Near -Thanksgiving Dinner at Prairie on 11/14/2015. Eight of the 14 people pictured here have now passed on (names in **bold**).

Front row: Millie Moffett, Mary Frantz, **Rose Smith**, **Warren Hagstrom**, and **Ed Kolner**. Middle row: Carol Steinhart and Metje Butler. Back row: Rosemary Dorney, Orié Loucks, **Elinor Loucks**, **John Frantz**, Terri Prudlo, **Ruth Calden**, and **Rosemarie Lester**. Photo by Marty Drapkin.



Photo of Darrah from his online obituary page. Photo by The Dancer's Eye.

Darrah Chavey and his wife Peggy Weisensel Chavey joined Prairie on December 16, 2018. Their daughter Rhiannon Rudisill was the presenter two weeks later on the subject of UU Paganism. You can listen to her reflection on the Prairie website. I enjoyed getting to know both Darrah and Peggy. Both were friendly and down-to-earth, easy to talk to. I soon found out that they led ballroom dance workshops, and, in fact, for a while before we started the latest renovation of the building in May 2019, they held their workshops at Prairie on Sunday afternoons. Besides being a dance instructor, Darrah was a professor at Beloit College, teaching computer science and cultural approaches to mathematics (Ethnomathematics). We talked about his knowledge of this kind of math, and it was on my list to ask him to give a service on that subject. But life intervened, and both Covid and the renovation made Prairie unavailable for dancing, although a generous Prairie donor purchased a portable dance floor, and the

Chavey's took a look at it and talked of resuming their dance sessions. Another aspect that I enjoyed about Darrah was his Facebook posts, often humorous. Typical of his attitude was his last post on December 20, 2023: "Going in for 12-hour surgery tomorrow to replace my aging artificial heart valve with a spanking new one! When it's all over I'll either be feeling *much* better or ... not at all." If you are a Facebook user and can access his page, you will find his students speaking in glowing terms (and great sadness) about him as a mentor and warm and kind friend. An internet search for Darrah Chavey Youtube videos will turn up a series of his Ethnomathematics lectures. A Celebration of Life for Darrah will be held on Saturday, March 9, 2024, at 1:00 pm at The Castle, 501 Prospect St., Beloit, WI 53511.