

Prairie Fire

March
2024



Photo by Immo Wegmann 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

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

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Saturday 2

- 10a Women of Wonder (WOW)

Sunday 3

- 10a "International Religious Connections and Organizations" by Nick Schweitzer
- 10a OWL Workshop 6
- 10a RE Cooking Day
- 11:30a Potluck Sunday

Sunday 10

- 10a "Examining the Proposed Revision to Article II" by Rev. Ralph Tyksinski
- 10a RE age group classes
- 10a OWL Workshops 7 & 8
- 11:30a PUUPS (Prairie UU Parents) Group
- 11:30a Visitor Orientation - Annex

Saturday 16

- 1p Game Group

Sunday 17

- 10a Prairie's Annual Spring Auction

Tuesday 19

- 6:30p Prairie Board Meeting

Thursday 21

- 7p Guys Group

Sunday 24

- 10a TBA
- 10a RE age group classes

Tuesday 28

- 5:30p Prairie Evening Potluck

Sunday 31

- 10a "The Call of Easter: The Varied Ways UUs Find Meaning" by Rev. Ralph Tyksinski
- 10a RE age group classes

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 by Lukas Blazek on unsplash.com

Words from the President

Kathy Converse

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Many of us are busy at Prairie with meetings, planning services, providing music, teaching children, managing sound and visuals, making coffee, cleaning up, greeting members and visitors, and coming to participate. One week finishes and we are working on the next one and the cycle repeats. Our table of officers, board, committees, and RE staff list 50 members or friends with leadership responsibilities! But we rarely sit back to appreciate all we as a society accomplish.



We survived construction and have a wonderful, peaceful, and accessible space. Thanks to our Covid team, Program Committee, AV support, and Housing and Property Committee, we continued our adult services by Zoom then gradually reintroduced in-person services and religious exploration for our kids. We participated in social action activities. Unlike many churches, we did not lose but actually gained members!

Rev. Matt Aspin departed and long time member Rev. Ralph Tyksinski stepped up to provide ministerial support. Our DRE Alice Mandt returned to college and Karen Deaton stepped up to seamlessly continue our RE program. Our administrator Dan Klock moved away and Nancy Wunderlin took over this critical position.

All the changes required to continue services during Covid quarantines led our Program Committee and members with AV expertise, and the Housing and Property Committee, to develop a system to allow all members to participate in services and meetings. Still in place, this technology allows our members unable to leave home or on travel to not feel shut out. We can even have members vote from home in parish meetings.

Take time each Sunday to think of all the planning that preceded the service. We have a great deal to make us thankful.



Special Thank You

Much appreciation goes to Pageen Manolis Small for her excellent 20-month tenure as Prairie Fire editor. Her terrific work kept Prairie informed in timely and well designed ways and facilitated a smooth transition for the incoming editor, Anne Pryor.

Photo by Niklas Ohlogge on unsplash.com

What's Going on in Religious Exploration?

Karen Deaton, Director of Religious Exploration



Coming up in RE

- March 3: Cooking Day! We'll prepare a springtime dish to share at the congregation's potluck. 7 and 8 year olds will meet in the Annex for OWL.
- March 10: Age group classes. Last day of OWL. Prairie UU Parents' group (PUUPs) will meet after the service for a family pizza party downstairs, followed by parents' discussion upstairs from 12 to 1. Child care will be provided. Child care volunteers are needed
- March 17: Auction day. Children can gather downstairs for a movie or stay upstairs to participate in the auction. Child care volunteers are needed.
- March 24: Age group classes
- March 31: Age group classes

"I'd like to help in RE but I don't want to miss the service."

This is probably the most common response when we ask somebody to volunteer in RE. Well, you can do both! Our parents' group PUUPs meets on the second Sunday of each month. You can attend the service, join families downstairs for pizza, then play with children for an hour while their parents meet upstairs for discussion. I want to recruit a regular crew of volunteers to spend 90 minutes each month with the youngest members of our community. Please let me know if you are willing!

MidAmerica Regional Assembly

Nancy Wunderlin, Administrator



The MidAmerica Region is coming together, both online and at the First Unitarian Society of Madison, on Friday, April 19 and Saturday, April 20, 2024. "Threads That Connect, Stories That Inspire: 2024 Regional Assembly" is a synchronous event with the Pacific Western Region, sharing an online platform, programming, and speakers. There will be both in-person and online workshops and other programming, including the annual business meeting of the MA Region. [View more info and register here.](#)

If you would like to attend and need financial assistance, please contact Nancy Wunderlin at [admin\[at\]uuprairie.org](mailto:admin[at]uuprairie.org) or Kathy Converse at [president\[at\]uuprairie.org](mailto:president[at]uuprairie.org).

The Nominating Committee Is Recruiting!

Rachel Long, Nominating Committee Chair



Photo by Nathan Lemon on unsplash.com

Each year, about half of the board members, committee chairs, and Nominating Committee members complete their two-year terms. This year, as usual, many of these dedicated folks have agreed to serve another term. Please join me in thanking them!

But Prairie needs the energy, creativity, and commitment of all its members in order to thrive. Please consider serving in one of these important and rewarding Prairie leadership positions. Your two-year term would begin on July 1, 2024.

BOARD POSITIONS

The board is responsible for setting goals and making strategic choices for the society at large. Board members have the opportunity to participate in collective planning to improve Prairie's functioning and help guide its progress. Board members must be able to communicate honestly and respectfully with one another and with other Prairie members in order to reach decisions that honor members' different perspectives. Each board member serves as liaison to one or more committees to assure that the Board can incorporate committee input in its decision-making.

President - Per our bylaws, "*The president leads the board, and together with the board leads the congregation in accomplishing its business.*" The president prepares the agenda for board meetings, held at least ten times a year, and for parish meetings, held each year in November and May.

Vice President - Per our bylaws, "*The vice president shall assist the president and assume their duties as needed.*" In practice, the vice president has similar duties to an at-large member of the board, with the addition of collaborating with the president at times, and occasionally filling in when the president is unavailable.

Nominating Committee, cont'd.

At-Large Board Member - Board members are expected to attend and actively participate in meetings, and serve as board liaison to 1-2 committees.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE POSITIONS

The Nominating Committee has two essential functions - identifying candidates for all elected positions to present to the congregation at parish meetings, and recommending candidates for appointed positions to the board. The busy time for the Nominating Committee is February through April because committee chair, Nominating Committee, and board terms all end on June 30. Elections are held at the annual meeting in May. The board appoints committee chairs at either its May or June meeting. Nominating must also identify one member to the Committee on Ministry (COM) who is elected at each fall parish meeting. Nominating will convene at other times if there is an unforeseen vacancy in an elected or appointed position.

2 Nominating Committee positions are open this year.



Photo by Josh Calabrese on unsplash.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Watch prairienews and the April Prairie Fire for more information about the committees that will be needing new chairs this year. Here are the positions that may be opening up:

Archives Chair
 Housing & Property Chair
 Program Chair
 Religious Exploration Co-chair

We are a lay-led society and it takes our whole village to fulfill our mission. Let one of the Nominating Committee members know if you have questions or are interested in serving!

Mission and Vision Statements

Ken Skog, Mission and Vision Team Chair

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The Prairie Mission and Vision team (Ken Skog, Avalon Haykus, and Randy Converse) has prepared draft statements for consideration.

Our proposed statements:

Mission

With hope and kindness, we nurture a welcoming community, encouraging caring connections, open-mindedness, lifelong learning and spiritual growth, while actively promoting social justice and environmental stewardship.

Vision

We aspire to be a community where all voices are heard and valued, collectively acting as a catalyst for positive change, inspiring empathy and curiosity to champion a more just, equitable, and sustainable world.

The draft Mission and Vision Statements reflect the Prairie values and ideals identified by respondents to the Fall 2023 survey, as well as the following criteria:

- It is short, clear and concise
- It will include the Prairie values and ideals provided by respondents to the Fall 2023 survey
- It covers topics suggested by the UUA
- It uses words that inspire support of values and ideals and indicate support and care of members
- It Includes a value to promote environmental stewardship

Please provide any comments by Friday, March 1 to **kenskog[at]gmail.com**. Please use the email subject line “Mission and Vision Comments.” The Mission and Vision Team will consider comments and provide a revised draft to the board for their review. Ideally, the congregation will vote on the statements at the May parish meeting.



Photo by Neil Thomas on unsplash.com

Prairie's Annual Auction Puts the "FUN" in "FUNdraising!"

Chris Porter & Nancy Wunderlin, Finance Chair and Administrator

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Prairie's auction is your opportunity to fill your cupboard with goodies, fill your calendar with fun events for months to come, and get help with troublesome tasks – all while enjoying the companionship, creativity, and skills of your fellow Prairie members. Plus, you're helping to fund Prairie's operations, so mark your calendar and please come!

Annual Prairie Auction - Sunday, March 17th, 10:00 a.m.

New This Year! Prairie has [a new auction website](#) making it easy to submit items to donate and browse all the exciting items available to bid on at the live event.

Here's how you can get ready:

1. Think about what you can donate to the auction. Are you a baker who can provide a loaf of special bread for the lucky bidder to take home at the end of the auction? Would you like to offer a special dinner party? Do you have a special skill or hobby to share? Would you like to get to know some Prairie kids better by babysitting? Nothing is too unusual for this auction. In recent years, offerings have included the paper-shredding services of a pet hamster, a "Come as Your Favorite Canadian" costume party, and Didgeridoo lessons. [Click here to submit your donated items.](#)
2. Check the website frequently to keep up to date on what's being donated and consider what you and/or your loved ones want to bid on. Look for a display in the foyer, too, where you can peruse the offerings and make requests.
3. Make a plan to attend and bid! If you will not be able to attend, you may recruit somebody to bid for you. On the big day, we'll have a very brief service before we begin the auction. Child care will be available but many children enjoy attending with their families. The auctioneer will explain how the bidding process will work, then all items will be auctioned off.

Continued on next page

Prairie Auction, cont'd.

New this year, we'll be emailing statements of your winning bids with a link to pay online. Our goal is to email statements to bidders and donors the same day as the auction. This will streamline the process of tracking auction purchases and payments. If you prefer, you may pay by check or cash before you leave.

Questions?

Contact Chris Porter, Finance Chair or Nancy Wunderlin, Admin



A Message from the Three Madison UU Congregations' Social Justice Chairs Pam Gates and Chris Porter, Social Action Co-chairs

On Saturday, March 2, the Poor People's Campaign will hold a rally starting at the State Street steps of the Wisconsin State Capitol. People will start gathering at 10:30 a.m., march around the Capitol at 11, and end at First United Methodist Church, 203 Wisconsin Ave., at noon to learn about the campaign's goals and demands. A lunch is planned for 1 p.m.

James Reeb Social Justice chair Randy Coloni plans to be there and is looking for a joint UU presence. FUS Social Justice coordinator Kristi Sprague has been supportive. Randy intends to display the UU banner "Side With Love." Look for him if you attend.

This rally is in conjunction with other Poor People's Campaign rallies around the U.S. and is a prelude to a Poor People's and Low Wage Workers' Assembly in Washington, D.C. in June and a massive Get-Out-the-Vote campaign afterward.

Out-of-town people are coming for this event. We hope you will join this effort to communicate with our legislators about everyone's rights to such things as a living wage, housing and health care access, and environmental justice, and to launch a voter-education campaign.

The Poor People's Campaign is a national one that is now several years old. For more information about the rally, see the poster on the next page or email Randy Coloni, James Reeb UU Congregation, at [rjam\[at\]jruuc.org](mailto:rjam@jruuc.org).

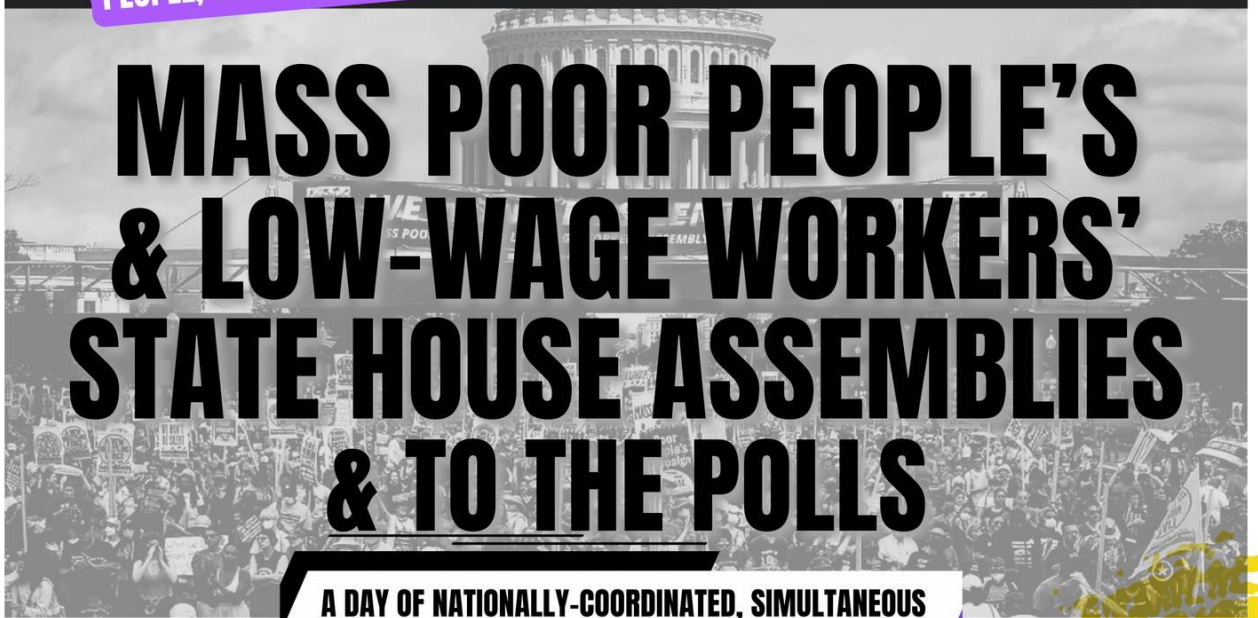
SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2024

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SAVE THE DATE

LET'S JOIN TOGETHER AS POOR AND IMPACTED PEOPLE, CLERGY, AND ADVOCATES! →

MADISON, WI
11AM MARCH -- 12PM GATHERING



MASS POOR PEOPLE'S & LOW-WAGE WORKERS' STATE HOUSE ASSEMBLIES & TO THE POLLS

A DAY OF NATIONALLY-COORDINATED, SIMULTANEOUS DIRECT ACTION ALL ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

CALLING ALL PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN & DEMAND LIVING WAGES, HEALTHCARE, VOTING RIGHTS & STOPPING VOTER SUPPRESSION, EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL, WORKER/LABOR RIGHTS, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, ACCESS TO HOUSING, FULLY-FUNDED PUBLIC EDUCATION, ABOLISHING POVERTY, AND THE UNITY OF LOVE, NOT THE DIVISION OF HATE.

BRING THE DEMANDS OF 140 MILLION POOR & LOW-WEALTH PEOPLE DIRECTLY TO LAWMAKERS AT STATE CAPITOLS. EVERYBODY IN, NOBODY OUT!
WE MUST CHALLENGE POVERTY BEING THE 4TH LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN THIS COUNTRY!
WE MUST ACTIVATE 85 MILLION POOR & LOW-WEALTH ELIGIBLE VOTERS!
WE WON'T BE SILENT ANYMORE!

RSVP HERE →



REPAIRERS OF THE BREACH

Poor People's Campaign
A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL

KAIROS CENTER
FOR RELIGIONS, RIGHTS & SOCIAL JUSTICE

WISCONSIN
Poor People's Campaign
A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL

Our Inspirational Cookbook of 1982

Karleen Tysinski, Cookbook Team member

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That amazing wonder, the *Prairie Kitchen Companion*, is a great story of how the members of Prairie back in 1982 achieved the making of a cookbook, just working with what they had. Here are bits of that story.

The 1982 members approached the cookbook as a communal project, something that members could be involved with and enjoy. The first call for recipes came on January 26, 1982. For a title, the committee created a fun contest. Several interesting names were suggested and the *Prairie Kitchen Companion* was chosen. A call also went out to artists who might like to have their art on the category pages.

Once recipes were collected, they needed to be typed up and then printed. Fortunately for this project, new technology was used as an enticement for volunteers. Dick and Julie Bonser were the only Prairie members who owned a computer and potential typists were offered “*the opportunity to learn how to use a home computer word processor. Fairly good typing skills are necessary but it is easy to correct mistakes.*” Many members took them up on this offer and the recipes were typed on the Apple II+ computer at the Bonselers’ home. Another team did the layout with the pictures added.

The cookbook was ready to go to press by the end of the year. Again, technology was a challenge but thanks to Lee and Alice Bullen, who had a printer, the book was printed, pages and cover. Next, an assembly line of the congregation collated it.

Metje Butler was the artist for the cover. She also took care of the “art end,” the placement of art components. Metje has returned Prairie after a brief absence. She can tell you more about this impressive project and her role in it.



2024 Cookbook Crew members Deesa Pence, Mary Mullen, Karleen Tysinski, Susan Herr-Hoyman. Photo credit: Dirk Herr-Hoyman

Creating that cookbook without today’s technology was truly a wonder. It’s a beautiful collection of recipes from the Prairie members at that time. We remember the people and those good times when we look through that cookbook.

That is why we are creating a new 2024 cookbook. Again, as in 1982, receiving recipes is essential. Please take the time to type up your recipes. Or, you could send photocopies. Any way you want to send us your recipes is acceptable.

Continued on next page

Cookbook, cont'd.

You are welcome to send up to five at this time but we may ask for more as the project continues. The deadline for submissions is March 15. Important information to include with your recipe: title of recipe, your name or name of person donating and, if desired and important, the source of the recipe.

You can send recipes by email to Susan Herr-Hoyman at [herrsm\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:herrsm[at]gmail.com), put them in the envelope by the poster on the table in the lobby, or hand them to any cookbook committee member: Susan Herr-Hoyman, Mary Mullen, Suzanne Gernandt, Deesa Pence, and Karleen Tyksinski.

We, the 2024 Prairie community, can and will create a new, wonderful cookbook to enjoy for many years, inspired by that team of 1982!



Photo by Calum Lewis on unsplash.com

Life After Prison

Katie Mulligan, Social Action Committee member

Editor's note: Two members of Prairie's Social Action Committee, Pam Gates and Katie Mulligan, attended JustDane's Reentry Simulation. This is Katie's experience.

Walk a mile in someone's shoes before you render judgment. I had a chance to follow that familiar advice last December.

The occasion was a simulation program of what it is like for a person leaving prison and trying to survive in the outside world. JustDane, a criminal justice organization, offered this program in which each attendee adopted the persona of a newly released prisoner who struggled to meet such ordinary needs as food and housing.

My role-playing shoes belonged to Lester Jacoby, a Black man on parole after serving a 25-year sentence for a murder committed when he was 19. Lester had worked in the prison kitchen and hoped to go to MATC to study culinary arts. He had a temporary home in his sister's trailer.

This simulation program was to cover the first four weeks after release from prison. Fifteen minutes were allowed to accomplish tasks typically designated for a week. A loud bell announced the end of each segment and those not in their chairs risked a return to prison.

Life after Prison, cont'd.

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I found a birth certificate, transportation vouchers, and \$300 in cash in Lester's folder, along with a rubber band for my wrist. I had my first encounter with the reality of my situation when I learned that Lester had to wear an electronic monitoring device as a condition of his parole and use his scant funds for the privilege.

"Make sure you get your basic needs met," urged the organizers. "Basic" didn't mean easy. One side of the room was lined with a long table or people sitting behind signs. The first sign read, "sex offender registration." I became most familiar with the person behind the "parole officer" sign. Each of us had to sign in with our parole officer every week or risk a return to prison.

Lester and I had a relaxed first week. "Our" sister had not yet tired of my presence. I used a transportation voucher to get my official ID and stood in line to report to my parole officer. But when I returned to my seat, I learned that my calm was undeserved.

Some attendees reported that they had spent time in jail for violations of their parole conditions. The list of possible offenses was long and included failure to pay restitution, register as a sex offender, and pass a drug test. I noticed men wearing badges circling the room and reading name tags in search of other offenders. I began to sense what it would be like to live with the constant fear of breaking a rule that could mean a return to prison.



Photo by Beck VdlaRok on unsplash.com

I headed for a room containing the job center and had my first taste of a bureaucratic challenge. After spending precious minutes in the line behind the job counselor's desk, I learned I had to wait in another line for a form. I rushed back to the table to sign in with my parole officer and waited in line again. The bell rang before I could return to the job center.

During week three, I arrived at the job counselor's desk and pleaded for a job that would help me pursue my interest in culinary arts and allow me to move out of my sister's trailer. The best offer was a position as a cafeteria assistant in a hospital that paid \$257 a week.

Life after Prison, cont'd.

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By week four, I had nearly abandoned the idea of pretending I was Lester and was just angry about the incredible odds against anyone in his situation. I got the list of available apartments and found the cheapest was \$625/month for a studio. By the end of the simulation, I was arguing with the person playing a social worker who advised me to get a roommate.

My last words in the simulation were, "I'm a 45-year-old Black man who was convicted of murder and has a very low-paying job. No one is going to rent to me in this market."

What did I learn from this experience? I knew, of course, that finding a good-paying job for someone with a prison record and minimal work experience would be difficult. But I was astounded by the number and variety of obstacles that confront someone trying to survive in a changed and challenging world.

Attendees reported that they received only a two-week supply of medication for physical and mental conditions. Many of them had a mental illness, which likely was exacerbated by incarceration. Opening a bank account posed a whole new set of problems, but it was important for finding housing. Cell phones and credit cards were unfamiliar items. All of us struggled with transportation problems as we tried to find work and housing.

I knew that Wisconsin has a particularly shameful record concerning its rate of revocation of parole and subsequent return to prison. The state has 18 rules of supervision that include such vague requirements as "avoiding conduct not in the best interest of the public welfare." A person can be revoked and sent back to prison for breaking a rule that does not involve a crime. However, I did not anticipate how stressful it would be to try to find a job and a place to live while fearing I would break a rule I did not understand.

The simulation could not begin to capture what must be one of the most difficult aspects of life after release. Many people struggle alone with these demanding challenges. This idea was reinforced in the discussion about the simulation. One of the panelists, who had been out of prison for five years, said he had considered suicide two years ago. "I was saved because I could talk to my friends at JustDane. They had become my family."

JustDane offers programs that address many of these problems, with their Circles of Support program especially relevant. Five community members meet with a person before he leaves prison and develop a reentry plan. Thereafter, they meet weekly for up to a year to provide support and help resolve problems. Check out the website at <https://justdane.org> for other efforts. The organization has a 15-year history and boasts a two-year recidivism rate of 9-10% for its participants compared with the state average of 67%.