

# Prairie Fire

July  
2024



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

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# July 2024 Calendar

Please see [www.uuprairie.org](http://www.uuprairie.org) for detailed descriptions.

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## Tuesday 2

- 5p Spanish Speakers Potluck

## Saturday 6

- 10a Women of Wonder (WOW)

## Sunday 7

- 10a "Thomas Jefferson: His Religious Beliefs" by Rev. Ralph Tyksinski
- 10a RE Park Day
- 11:30a Potluck Sunday
- 12:00p Humanist Union

## Friday 12 - Sunday 14

- 3:00p RE Family Camp

## Sunday 14

- 10a "Summer Reads"
- No RE activities at Prairie
- 11:30a Visitor Orientation

## Tuesday 16

- 6:30p Prairie Board Meeting

## Thursday 18

- 7p Prairie Guys Group

## Saturday 20

- 1p Prairie Game Group

## Sunday 21

- 10a UU General Assembly Debrief
- 10a RE Splash Pad Day

## Thursday 25

- 6p Prairie Evening Potluck

## Sunday 28

- 10a Joint Service with Free Congregation of Sauk County
- 10a No RE at Prairie. Childcare at Sauk City

## 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 12-4pm and by appointment



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## 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.

## From Prairie's Outgoing President Kathy Converse

As I leave the presidency at PUU, I am filled with pride at the accomplishments of our congregation, especially our board and committee members and staff. When I started my term, we were not even in our renovated building and were under COVID restrictions. Members didn't just volunteer; they showed up with energy and contributions to bring us to our vital present.

From words I read at our dedication, from "A House for Our Dreams," by Dori J. Somers (2015):

This is a special place, as every home,  
That shelters those who love and strive and share.  
Its blessing is in lives that meet within...  
In living, learning, caring, sheltered here.



## From Prairie's Incoming President Ken Skog

Just as Kathy is rightfully proud, all of us at Prairie can share in that pride. I'm particularly impressed by the continuing heartfelt contributions of our members and friends. These contributions help to provide a welcoming and supportive community for people of all backgrounds and religious, or non-religious, philosophies.

Every contribution matters. Whether it's a thoughtful presentation, a joyful activity, or a considerate conversation, these acts all contribute to a stronger community. I look forward to supporting all of these efforts.



# What's Going on in Religious Exploration?

**Karen Deaton, Director of Religious Exploration**



## About Summertime RE

During the summer, we will not have age-group Sunday School classes. Instead, we will have a variety of all-ages fun activities outside whenever weather permits. Please apply sunscreen and insect repellent to children before our Sunday morning activities. With all the rain we've been having, mosquitos will be plentiful!

## Coming up in RE

- June 30 – All-Prairie field trip to Vilas Zoo! No activities at Prairie. Prairie people of all ages can socialize and get to know each other better while exploring the zoo.
- July 7 – Park Day. We'll go to nearby Marlborough Park for free play and lawn games. We need 2 more volunteers!
- July 12 - 14 – RE Family Camp will be happening so we will not have RE or PUUPs at Prairie. Please let Karen know if you will want child care at Prairie on the July 14.
- July 21 – All are welcome to join us on a family field trip to the [Fitchburg Splash Pad at McKee Farms Park](#). Meet at Prairie at 9:45 to carpool or just meet us at the park.
- July 28 – Joint service with the [Free Congregation of Sauk County](#) No activities at Prairie. Please let Karen know whether your family plans to attend so that appropriate child care can be arranged.



## RE Family Camp - not just for families with children!

Everybody is invited to join us at the Twin Lakes beach at Governor Dodge State Park on Saturday, July 13, from about 9:30 am into the afternoon. This is a quiet beach with a sandy, shallow entry. There is a bathhouse and a large grassy lawn, as well as some shade trees.

We are looking for adult volunteers on Friday, July 12 and Saturday, July 13 to build campfires, lead sing-alongs, do nature crafts, or go on hikes. Friendship Retreat Center is a 45-minute drive from Prairie. If you are leading an activity, we'll feed you a meal! Contact me to talk about your ideas.

# Prairie's New Mission and Vision Statements

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Ken Skog, Mission and Vision Team

These statements were adopted at Prairie Parish Meeting on May 19, 2024.

## Mission

Guided by hope and kindness, we nurture a welcoming community that fosters caring connections, open-mindedness, lifelong learning, and spiritual growth while championing 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.



## Humanist Union Program on Gaza

Bob Park, Humanist Union

Humanist Union participants are invited to join the monthly potluck lunch in the Meeting House following the Sunday morning service on July 7. Then we will head next door to the Annex around 12:15 for our program.

Kathy Walsh of the Madison-Rafah Sister City Project and Tsela Barr of Jewish Voice for Peace will present the program, "Gaza: Then and Now." They will have photos of Rafah from their visits in 2005 and 2012. All are invited to the presentation and discussion from 12:30 - 1:30 in the Annex.

# 2024 Spring Parish Meeting Committee Reports

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## Archives Committee

Mary Mullen, Chair

Members: Mary Mullen (Chair), Barbara Park, Robert Park (our digital archivist), Rosemary Dorney, Susan Herr-Hoyman, Dirk Herr-Hoyman (who has graciously agreed to become the Archives Committee Chair), and upcoming, Jason Deschard (soon-to-be digital archivist)

The Archives Committee usually meets monthly, in person at Prairie, with a few exceptions. We have met three times since the November 19, 2023, Parish Meeting. Our goal is to collect, preserve, and make known the history of Prairie.

Since the last Parish Meeting, committee members have been:

- going through and culling boxes of old materials stored in the administrator's office,
- getting several documents onto Prairie's Google Drive so that they can be more easily updated and accessed, and to guarantee that it's not only one private person holding them on their personal computer. These include a spreadsheet of Prairie committee members since 2013, a spreadsheet of poetry by members written by members and shared at Prairie events, a cumulative list of members since our beginnings in 1967, and a list of deceased members and friends of Prairie,
- processing Sunday service and memorial service recordings to make them available digitally. This is the work of our digital archivist, Robert Park,
- writing articles for the *Prairie Fire* about members who have died (K.K. Anderson, Doug Cook, Elinor Loucks, Darrah Chavey),
- happy to learn that, at our urging, many more Prairie Board and Parish Meeting minutes have been posted to the website, in the "For Members Only" section.

Some current decisions:

- to share our past directories with the Wisconsin Historical Society (previously it was only *Prairie Fires*, and Parish and Board reports including budgets),
- to print out a directory every January 1 for our archives since the directory is now mostly digital and not printed regularly,
- to limit the future collection of death records, memorial service orders of service, and obituaries to people who have been signed members, nonmembers who had maintained a participatory presence, but not children

## Archives Committee, cont.

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or grandchildren of members unless they had been active such as attending RE for years or perhaps had worked in childcare. We haven't yet discussed keeping records of others whose memorial services were held at Prairie but we do have some of those in our collection and on the spreadsheet that records our holdings,

- to continue keeping a file of bylaws and their changes, although we haven't planned on sharing these with the WHS, and
- to scan our newspaper clipping files.

We still haven't turned over the *Prairie Fires* and minutes to the Wisconsin Historical Society because we want to be certain we have all of the minutes from 2020-2023.

## Caring Committee

Heidi Hughes, Chair

Members: Heidi Hughes (Chair), Erin Bosch, Aileen Nettleton, Barbara Chatterton, Suzanne Gernandt, Margit Moses, Reverend Ralph Tyksinski

### Activities

Since our last parish meeting on November 19, 2023, the Caring Committee has been ever present to provide care for all our members. This means lending a listening ear, helping to do small tasks when people are recovering from illness, surgery, stressful situations, or bringing a new baby home, as well as others.

We met most recently on March 12 and discussed members in our caring groups that have reached out and needed some help. We shared ways to support members, including ideas about connecting members to each other that may have similar life experiences so that they can more readily support members in need. We also discussed our desire to be in close touch with the Membership Committee because we both are continuously editing our lists of members who are joining and leaving.



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## Caring Committee, cont.

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### Accomplishments

- All members received a small tutorial about how to navigate Breeze, giving us easy electronic access to members/friends. This is ongoing.
- We began recording meeting notes and will eventually get them into a shared Google Drive folder.
- We contact our caring groups at least annually, letting everyone know we are here to help!
- We sent an updated list to the Nominating Committee of tasks that members can check when completing their new survey of talents/skills/interests, which are particularly specific for this committee.
- Rev. Ralph organized and helped present a program on November 29, 2023 for Adult Exploration on Advanced Care Planning with Dan Zimmerman. Now retired, Dan was the chief author with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, where he spent his career developing all of the advanced directive materials.

### Supporting Our Mission/Vision Statements

We continue to respect the diversity of needs for caring, privacy, and community. We remain focused on our elderly members who may no longer be able to attend services regularly. Our shared values of empathy and caring help us to work together easily, sharing information, getting tasks done, and helping members that may need some extra care.

Reverend Ralph Tyksinski has continued to be an extremely appreciated asset of knowledge, experience, and expertise in pastoral care for this committee. He is always involved immediately with anyone in need with his due diligence and compassion. Many thanks, Ralph!



**PrairieUU**  
Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society





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## Finance Committee

### Chris Porter, Chair

Committee members: Chris Porter (Chair), Chris Unger (Prairie Treasurer), Suzanne Gernandt, Ken Skog, Gary Gates

Prairie continues to be on solid financial ground. We fell a little short of our pledge goal of \$144,000. We aimed for \$144,000 because that was the amount of pledges received in 2023.

We did reach \$139,000. Our budgeted income for 2024 is \$183,000. The \$139,000 pledge amount was used in our budget. We budgeted \$13,000 in auction income. We raised \$11,000 in the auction. Other areas of income (rent, offering, interest, etc.) are tracking as expected or slightly higher.

Our budgeted expenses for 2024 are \$174,000. Expenses are basically tracking as expected.

Prairie has \$295,000 in the bank. Prairie has five certificates of deposit with varied maturity dates. Each CD started with a deposit of \$25,000. Most of the other money is in a money market fund. Money in checking is basically to cover one month's expenses.

We have received 61 pledges for 2024. While we are doing well, members should be aware that 26% of the amount pledged comes from four pledges. We are tremendously grateful for this exceptional generosity but we need to recognize that this is not sustainable in the long term.

The only debt that Prairie has is a loan of \$8,000 from First Unitarian Society that only has to be paid if Prairie dissolves. The meeting house and annex are owned without debt.

## Hospitality Committee

Ruth Ellen Saul, Chair

Members: Ruth Ellen Saul (Chair), Barbara Chatterton, Lynn Currie, Evan Fisher, Paula Pachciarz, Rick Ruecking, Patty Stockdale, Chris Unger, Nancy Wunderlin

### Activities

- Coffee service provided before and after Sunday choir practice and Sunday services
- Monthly Sunday potluck coordination, execution, and cleanup



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## Housing and Property Committee

Randy Converse, Chair

Members: Randy Converse (Chair), Al Nettleton, John Wunderlin, John Gernandt, Gene Kain, Heidi Hughes, Gary Gates, Ruth Ellen Saul

Karen Deaton (Gardening Subcommittee Chair)

Heidi Hughes and Barbara Chatterton (Aesthetics Subcommittee - which maintains the Prairie UU "ambiance")

### Activities/Accomplishments:

- Raju did his usual good job shoveling, keeping grounds in shape during the winter, and maintaining the cleanliness of our two buildings,
- Rev. Ralph installed a gutter on the roof over Annex front entryway,
- Al Nettleton fixed our bubbler,
- John Wunderlin established a separate AV Committee to oversee AV maintenance,
- We replaced the Annex front doormat, installed an AED in the Meeting House, upgraded the first aid kits, and recharged the fire extinguishers,
- The boilers underwent a maintenance check and 2 major repairs

### Future projects

The Annex exterior will be painted this spring. The contract is signed. We are just waiting for warmer weather! John Wunderlin developed the color scheme to fit in with the existing colors of the Meeting House and Annex.

## Membership Committee

### Deesa Pence & Patty Stockdale, Co-chairs

Members: Deesa Pence (Co-chair), Patty Stockdale (Co-chair), Judy Lazarus, Paula Pachciarz

By the numbers:

Number of members May 2024: 100

Number of members from last parish meeting, November 2023: 106

Number of new or rejoined members so far in 2024: 3

Number of members who resigned or became friends: 6

Number of members who passed: 2 - Elinor Loucks and Darah Chavey

#### Activities and Accomplishments

- *Weekly Greeting at Sunday Services*  
2 or more Membership Committee members greet attendees on Sunday mornings. We answer questions from visitors and direct attendees into the meeting room. We introduce new families to the DRE.
- *Conduct monthly Visitor Orientations*  
2 to 4 Membership Committee members meet on the second Sunday of each month with interested visitors or newcomers in the Annex to discuss Prairie and UUism. Visitor Orientations last up to an hour, given the available time of the visitors.
- *Sponsor a monthly Circle Potluck*  
On the fourth Thursday of the month, we invite the congregation and friends to join us for a friendly potluck dinner. Originally, the monthly potluck began as a way for newcomers to share in the Circle Dinner experience. Circle Dinners are typically formed in the late summer or early fall.
- *New Members and New Member Recognitions as needed*  
Prairie welcomed Judy Wacker, Matt Wise, and their 3 children Abby, Naomi, and Hannah as new members on April 7. Long time member Casey Steinau was also recognized; she lived in Alaska and returned to Madison and Prairie last year. Rev Ralph Tyksinski suggested some changes to the New Member Recognition that we implemented. He broadened the welcoming experience to include words from Kathy Converse as President as well as from Andrea Scott as RE Chair. Andrea brought kids from RE to welcome Matt and Judy's family. Prairie has had more families visiting so hopefully they enjoyed experiencing the wholehearted welcome.
- *Update Visitor Folders and New Member Folders*  
We give Visitor Folders to those who seem more than casually interested in Prairie and New Member Folders to those who have recently joined. Ask to

## Membership Committee, cont.

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see either or both of these. They are kept at the Welcoming Table. Please only browse them, as they require time and energy to assemble.

- *Continuously update contact information* in the database for members and friends with Prairie's administrator.
- *Send out emails* to let people know how to stay informed via PrairieNews, PrairieViews, *Prairie Fire*, *UU World*, and the Interest and Talent Survey. Typically we send this email out around the time the *UU World* is sent to members. The UUA sends the *UU WORLD* out twice a year.
- *Update visitor tracking spreadsheet* for weekly visitors who complete visitor forms. Membership Committee sends welcoming emails to visitors the week after the Sunday they attend and invites them to upcoming Visitor Orientations, Potluck Sundays, and other events on the horizon. Prairie's administrator created a new email address:

[Welcome2Prairie@uuprairie.org](mailto:Welcome2Prairie@uuprairie.org). We think this is more welcoming than the Membership email.

- *Copy and restock the Visitor Forms* that are in every seat back in the meeting room. At the Membership Committee's request, the Presider asks the congregation and visitors to complete visitor forms and to put them on the Welcoming Table, to drop them into the offering basket, or to hand them to someone.
- *Update yard signs to publicize Prairie's weekly Sunday programs*  
The Membership Committee updates the signage in front of the main building weekly and posts the coming Sunday service on Nextdoor.com.
- *Pens and pins*  
The Membership Committee purchased customized pens and pins or labels with pronouns. In 2024, we will be purchasing Prairie t-shirts.
- *Organize Circle Dinner groups* in late summer or early fall.
- Endeavor to *keep newer and long-time members connected to and involved with Prairie* by reaching out and calling or emailing them.



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### Concerns and Goals

*Goal - to restore Membership Directory to the Members-Only section of the website*  
Membership Committee Co-chairs and possibly Archives Committee representatives are formally requesting that the Membership Directory be returned to

## Membership Committee, cont.

the Members-Only section of the website. We plan to attend a board meeting as soon as possible to discuss this issue. Membership Committee believes that the online directory is more accessible to members than the online Breeze database, and consolidates and centralizes contact information of members and friends. More accessibility encourages more accessibility, so members and friends can more easily reach out to each other. Another positive aspect is that folks can more readily review the data themselves to keep it updated. As a point of information, the online/printed directory comes from the database.

If the board and others are concerned about a data breach, a second layer of security can be added for entry. As far as we know, no negative results nor identity theft occurred because of the breach last summer. Furthermore, there is no confidential information on the members-only section of the website, except the directory that can be misused. The separate section of the website was created to formally divide the public website from the business side of Prairie, not to store confidential information. Ask our Administrator for the password to the members-only section to explore. Also, ask her if you would like a printed copy of the directory.

*Concern - the website needs refreshing and updating*

It has been serving the church for 5 or so years and needs an overhaul. It is the main conduit for attracting visitors to our congregation and for informing current members and friends.

## Nominating Committee

Rachel Long, Chair

Members: Rachel Long (Chair), Heidi Hughes, Margit Moses, Paula Pachciarz

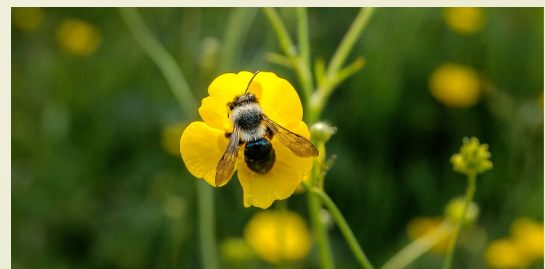


Photo by Oscar McGlone on [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)

### Activities/Accomplishments

Recruitment - The central function of the Nominating Committee is to find people who have the interest, energy, and skills to serve in Prairie's many leadership positions. We do 3 different types of recruitment:

1. We nominate candidates for elected positions including Board, Committee on Ministry, and Nominating Committee members. The congregation votes to affirm these nominees at either the Spring Parish Meeting (Board and Nominating Committee), or the Fall Parish Meeting (Committee on Ministry).

2. We recommend candidates to the Board for positions that they appoint, specifically committee chairs.
3. We assist with identifying people who can serve as members of committees (the chair of each committee is primarily responsible for recruiting its members) and people who serve Prairie in other ways, such as the *Prairie Fire* editor.

We successfully recruited new and returning members of the Board and committee chairs for all open positions save one. As of this writing (April 28, 2024) we have not identified a candidate for President. We hope to announce a candidate by May 5, the deadline for election at the Parish Meeting on May 19. We plan to present to the congregation the following slate of candidates for elected positions for 2-year terms ending June 20, 2026:

Board Vice President - Renee Deschard  
Board At Large Member - Molly Plunkett  
Board At Large Member - Susan Herr-Hoymann  
Nominating Committee Member - Barbara Chatterton  
Nominating Committee Member - Mary Frantz

We have forwarded our recommendations to the Board for the open chair/co-chair positions.

**Skills and Interests Survey** - The Nominating Committee created this survey to help both our own committee and other Prairie committees to find people whose interests align with the work they do. Our goals are both to help members find their place in the congregation and to help the congregation fulfill its mission more effectively. We updated the survey this spring, adding questions that we hope will make it more useful. We encourage all members and active friends to complete the updated survey.

#### Concerns/Suggestions/Future Goals

Prairie has a wealth of talented and enthusiastic members, and we are ambitious in what we try to accomplish as a congregation. Yet we are a small congregation and we have limits. The Nominating Committee often struggles to identify those who not only are willing to serve as leaders but who would personally benefit from their service to Prairie. We don't just want people to "do the work" but rather we want our members to grow, learn, and find joy in the roles they fill at Prairie. We believe that Prairie needs to consider ways to

## Nominating , cont.

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reduce the number of roles we ask our members to fill, and to reduce or at least better share the workload of Prairie leaders. Here are ideas our committee has discussed:

1. We could have fewer committees and instead assign specific tasks to individual members. Current examples of this approach include our *Prairie Fire* editor (Anne Pryor) and our Art Coordinator (Suzanne Gernandt), neither of whom need to attend committee meetings or write reports as part of their roles.
2. We have observed that some chairs of committees often complete much of the work of their committees themselves rather than coordinating with and delegating tasks to other committee members. This approach may contribute to a culture in which people are apprehensive about the work involved in leadership. When the Board appoints chairs, part of the orientation could include emphasizing the importance of sharing tasks and decision-making with committee members, and of the chairs seeing themselves as one member of a team.
3. In the process of recruitment, the Nominating Committee regularly gets requests for “job descriptions” for each position. Where these do not yet exist, we recommend that the Board work with committee chairs to create detailed descriptions of what each committee is responsible for and the particular responsibilities of committee chairs so that incoming chairs have a clear guide. The Nominating Committee has gathered some of this information and will share it with the Board.
4. We could consider a Board structure in which multiple “at large” members chose their own Board Chair. This role could rotate and Board members could choose how to distribute the various functions which are currently accomplished by the President.
5. Though we modified our Committee on Ministry a few years ago to align with UUA recommendations, we may be too small of a congregation to require the type of COM we created. Our current COM model, in which

## Nominating Committee, cont.

the COM oversees the ministry of the entire congregation, caused some people to feel “micromanaged.” We were unable this past year to recruit a third person to serve on the COM. Having a team of members to help assure that we are all pulling in the same direction is a good idea but these problems indicate to us that reevaluation of the Committee on Ministry structure and function is needed.

Though the Board is ultimately responsible for determining our committee structure and other aspects of our operation, the Nominating Committee encourages all of us to share our ideas and perspectives with Board members. The Nominating Committee will continue its primary role recruiting our society’s leaders, but plans to also function as “matchmaker,” helping committees find members and helping members find their place in our society. The Nominating Committee has a unique perspective on the capabilities of our members and our society as a whole and hopefully can contribute to improving our effectiveness by sharing our ideas about Prairie’s structure.

## Program Committee

Renee Deschard, Chair

Voting Members: Renee Deschard (Chair),  
Barb Park, Robin Proud, Ann Sawyer, Karen Smith

Non Voting Members: Nancy Wunderlin, Rev. Ralph Tyksinski, (DRE and RE  
Committee Chair/s have ongoing invitations to all meetings)

### Activities/Accomplishments/Information

Huge thank you to all of our Prairie presiders, presenters, coordinators, readers, program assistants, musicians, tech & Zoom helpers who make our services so wonderful!

Prairie has increased collaboration with Madison area congregations. On Sunday, November 26, Prairie folk went to James Reeb for "Gratitude, Generosity...and Unlearning Colonization," by Rev. Karen Armina. On Sunday December 24, James Reeb folk visited Prairie for "The Christmas Truce," led by Rev. Ralph Tyksinski. James Reeb and the Free Congregation of Sauk County were also invited to our now annual Cozy Winter Brunch on December 25. In January, Rev. Anthony Wade from Second Baptist Church down the street came to talk at Prairie.



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## Program Committee, cont.

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Besides our own Rev. Ralph Tyksinski, we have had several faith leaders present at Prairie in the past six months including Rev. Dr. Michael Schuler, Rev. Anthony Wade, Rev. Pamela Rumancik, and Vicar Vica-Etta Henrietta Steel. We also had BadgerTalks on November 5, "Deciding What's True in a Polarized Society" by Michael Wagner, and February 25, "Political Dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" by Nadav Shelef (have two annually as part of that program). In addition, local non-profit organizations, area speakers, and our own Prairie members gave presentations on a wide variety of topics. The highest attendance Sunday was the intergenerational service, "Songs Celebrating Earth Day," with Ken Lonquist & Esperé Eckard-Lee on April 21.

### Concerns/Suggestions/Future Goals

Please feel free to email [program@uuprairie.org](mailto:program@uuprairie.org) at any time if you have a concern/suggestion. Thanks!

- A suggestion requested that we share the Order of Service with those on Zoom who might not be subscribed to News of the Week. The Order of Service will now be linked in the calendar/website and you can see it starting on April 21 service. Thanks to the Archives Committee, past Orders of Service are available here:  
[https://archives.uuprairie.org/order\\_of\\_service/index.htm](https://archives.uuprairie.org/order_of_service/index.htm)
- A concern was brought up with the phrase "please stand as you're willing and able." The new phrase is, "Please stand in body or spirit."
- Program Committee purchased a step for presenters to use, as we can't adjust the height of our podium.
- There was a request to pay for a youth tech helper. RE and Program will re-evaluate this request when creating budgets in August.
- A suggestion to add a phrase similar to Reeb's after joys and concerns.
- Approximately once a quarter, the Presider Script will include, "If you'd like to discuss your joys or concerns further you may contact Rev. Ralph or your Caring Committee volunteer."
- Sentences have been added at the beginning of the script thanking youth helpers as requested from a suggestion.
- We added another closing sentence at the very end of the service because the end of the service felt too abrupt.



## Program Committee, cont.

The Program Committee sent out a survey on March 20 which had 32 responses (an average survey response rate is 15% so ~30% is a high response rate). We are currently going through the responses and will have a separate report to address suggestions/concerns brought up in the survey.

## Music Sub-committee

Members: Nancy Wunderlin, Dan Proud, Barb Park

### Activities/Accomplishments/Information

In the first part of 2024, we heard performances that included harmonica, ukulele, recorder, harp, flute, guitar, voice, saxophone, and piano. The choir continues to grow! We're grateful to our childcare workers and volunteers that provide childcare during rehearsals on Sunday mornings.

The choir performed 6 times already this year and will continue through the end of May and possibly early June. Our choir director, Barb Park, plans to attend the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries (AUUMM) annual conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico at the end of July. Please reach out to anyone on the committee if you are interested in participating in music performances at Prairie.

## AV and Tech Committee

John Wunderlin, Chair

Members: John Wunderlin (Chair), Marie Andrae, Al Nettleton

### Activities/Accomplishments/Information

- Replaced all Wi-Fi routers on campus with a single integrated solution that provides extremely high speed Wi-Fi on the entire grounds including outdoors. This will also allow communication of all devices on campus and gives us the ability to have a separate private and secure network as well as an isolated public Wi-Fi that doesn't have access to internal computers.
- Installed Home Assistant to run our 6 different thermostats remotely and on pre-defined schedules
- Installed a new high resolution pan/tilt/zoom camera in the back of the meeting hall, so we no longer need a tripod in the middle of the congregation, and which allows many different angles and views for our Zoom attendees as well as recordings.

## Program Committee, cont.

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- Installed the old camera discreetly in the front of the room to give another camera angle of the entire room
- Purchased a new microphone cover for the lectern to reduce 'popping' sounds if speakers get too close to the mic
- Purchased a new lavalier microphone with a high quality lapel clip to make it easier for the Story for All Ages speakers to use
- Continued to update the sound board and Zoom instruction guides as we gain experience

We are always looking for volunteers to help run the sound board and Zoom systems. Please let John Wunderlin know if this is something you'd be interested in.

## Religious Exploration (RE) Committee

Karen Deaton, Susan Herr-Hoyman, and Andrea Scott

RE Team: Susan Herr-Hoyman (Co-chair), Andrea Keyser (Co-chair), Marie Andrae, Carl Wacker, Renee Deschard (liaison with Program Committee), Karen Deaton (Director of Religious Exploration)

### Activities

We've seen exciting growth in our RE program this year. Average attendance in RE so far in 2024 has been fifteen students, compared to an average of 9 during the fall of 2023. The congregation is doing a good job of welcoming new families and strengthening relationships with families who've been with us for a while!

Our "regular RE" classes are divided into 3 age groups and usually meet twice a month. Why not every week? The first Sunday of the month is Cooking Day, when all ages together prepare a treat for the congregation to enjoy in our potluck. There is usually one Sunday a month that is a special day such as a holiday party or a movie day during a parish meeting instead of age-group classes. Toddlers are cared for by our child care staff and volunteers; they join older children for activities as appropriate.

We are committed to offering Our Whole Lives (OWL) human sexuality education for all our young people. Usually we conduct one series each year but we missed a few years due to the pandemic so we have 2 series this year and expect to run 2 series next year. We ran OWL for 7&8 year olds in the winter and are currently conducting OWL for 11&12 year olds.

## RE Committee, cont.

The Prairie UU Parents' group has continued to meet after the service on the second Sunday of each month. Child care is provided during choir practice, the Interweave meeting, and PUUPs.



Photo from [unspash.com](https://unspash.com) with Sophie Gerasimenko

### Volunteers & staffing

This year, we have worked to make teaching RE less of a time commitment than it has sometimes been in the past. Our goal is to have a team of 3 teachers for each age group rotating so that each teacher is in the classroom only 1 or 2 Sundays per month. We've achieved that goal with Carl Wacker, Randy Converse, and Karleen Tyksinski teaching the younger children. We've struggled to meet that goal for the 8-10 year olds; the OWL program interrupted regular RE for some of them, while one of their teachers moved away and another became unavailable most Sundays. Fortunately, several volunteers were able to step in for a few sessions apiece. Our oldest group of students has had one consistent teacher, Tim Scott, and occasional backup. RE Co-Chair Andrea Scott has been a floater and a stalwart sub when needed. Dirk Herr-Hoyman, Patty Stockdale, and Alice Mandt have been a solid team for cooking days once a month. Matt Wise and Casey Steinau attended OWL and, along with Karen Deaton, have devoted most Sundays in 2024 to facilitating workshops. We have two child care workers (Ollie Warnecke and Liam Creed) who look after infants and toddlers during choir practice and RE on a rotating basis, usually assisted by Jesse Garst.

We need more people to commit to working with our RE classes a couple of times per month, in order to build a really strong program for all ages. It would also help the program to have a regular team of 3 volunteers to provide child care from 12:00 to 1:00 during the PUUPs meetings the second Sunday of each month. If you are interested in helping out, talk to our DRE or an RE committee member and we'll work with you to figure out where you can fit in.

### Spending

In the first quarter of 2024, we spent 17% of our budget. (We save the bulk of our spending for late summer, as we prepare for the next RE year.) Compared to last year, we've spent less on books (relying entirely on our public library) and more on food (snacks, pizza for PUUPs, and potluck contributions).

## Social Action Committee

Pam Gates, Chris Porter, and Molly Plunkett

Members: Pam Gates (Co-chair), Chris Porter (Co-chair), Molly Plunkett, Katie Mulligan

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### Activities/Accomplishments/Information

The Social Action Committee continues its focus on homelessness. Shared-offering recipients for this period include the Catalyst Project (\$1101.61) and the Allied Partners Eviction Prevention Fund (\$1252.78). For the second quarter of 2024, we are sharing our offering with Willma's Fund.

Every first Saturday, a team of 8 from Prairie and James Reeb (usually 6 from Prairie and 2 from Reeb) gathers at 8:30 am at the River Food Pantry to make sandwiches, which are then delivered via van, aka the "Munch Truck," to low-income neighborhoods around the city.

In November, Prairie members wrote holiday cards to people in the Dane County jail. We had outstanding participation from a number of members, including kids, well surpassing the number requested per congregation. Some, such as Rosemary Dorney, wrote cards at home. Molly Plunkett held a group card-writing project on November 12 after the Prairie service.

In December, committee members Pam Gates, Katie Mulligan, and Chris Porter attended a Returning Prisoner Simulation put on by JustDane. This very powerful event gave us visceral understanding of how a person returning to society from prison struggles to reintegrate. All of us highly recommend this event; JustDane is doing another one on May 2 at Bethel Lutheran Church. You can read Katie's excellent article about her experience in the upcoming MOSES newsletter.

MOSES: The acronym stands for Madison Organizing in Strength, Equity, and Solidarity for Criminal-Legal System Reform. Prairie is one of 20+ member congregations, including all three Madison UU congregations. Pam Gates is Prairie's MOSES representative.

On April 18, committee members Katie Mulligan and Pam Gates made a presentation to the UUs at Capitol Lakes on the work of MOSES. Our presentation was made at the request of Aileen Nettleton. Prairie members Mary Frantz and Al and Aileen Nettleton attended, as well as a number of other UUs.

## Social Action Committee, cont.

Several Prairie members, including Barb Park, Casey Steinau, and Pam Gates, attended the MOSES Gala on December 9, a celebration of MOSES and other efforts to make the criminal-legal system make sense and to bring a greater level of compassion to it.

On Sunday, April 14, Prairie hosted the MOSES general monthly meeting. Unfortunately, it was a beautiful afternoon and only Pam Gates from Prairie attended. Rev. Ralph gave the invocation and Nancy Wunderlin helped set up the Zoom access.

MOSES yearbooks and newsletters are usually available in the front lobby. Pam Gates is one of the editors and contributors to these publications. A letter from MOSES listing its progress and efforts in the past year was published in the April *Prairie Fire*.

On April 23, MOSES and WISDOM held an action at the state Capitol to demonstrate why the use of solitary confinement in Wisconsin prisons should be ended. Pam Gates from Prairie attended, as well as several from FUS. The North Hearing Room was packed with speakers and supporters.

Allied Partners: Prairie continues to contribute to the Allied Food Pantry via a collection basket in the front lobby. When the basket is filled to a reasonable level with food and/or personal care items, we deliver it to the food pantry.



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## Social Action Committee, cont.

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Molly Plunkett and John Lewis planted flowers outside the Allied Boys and Girls Club on April 19.

Allied Partners has been working closely with organizations like the Allied-Dunn's Marsh Neighborhood Association, funding community meals and entertainment at the meals. In several months, the Allied Wellness Center is moving to a new building being erected where the roller rink was. There has been gunfire in the Allied Drive neighborhood and on one occasion a violent party, and neighborhood groups are working with people on violence and the trauma it causes.

WUUSAN (Wisconsin UU Social Action Network) is increasing its statewide recognition and will again be deeply involved in election and get-out-the-vote work this year. Molly Plunkett continues to sit on the WUUSAN Board of Directors.



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