

Prairie Fire

October
2024



Photo by Ashish R. Mishra on unsplash.com

Table of Contents

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| 2 | Calendar | 6 | What's Going on in RE? |
| 2 | Staff Office Hours | 7 | Prairie Seeks Minister |
| 3 | President's Perspective | 8 | Prairie's Social Action |
| 4 | Rev. Ralph's Message | 10 | Thank You! |

Prairie Contacts

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Anne Pryor, Prairie Fire Editor - [prairiefire\[at\]uuprairie.org](mailto:prairiefire@uuprairie.org)

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

October 2024 Calendar

Please see www.uuprairie.org for detailed descriptions.

2

Saturday 5

- 10a Women of Wonder (WOW)

Sunday 6

- 10a "Autumnal Lessons through Poets' Eyes" by Rev. Ralph Tyksinski
- 10a RE "Learn about Rosh Hashanah"
- 11:30a Potluck Sunday

Sunday 13

- 9:30a RE workshop
- 10a "Don't Light a Candle and Don't Curse the Darkness" by Rev. Dr. Michael A. Schuler
- 10a RE classes
- 11:30a PUPPS (Prairie UU Parents)
- 11:30a Visitor Orientation

Wednesday 16

- 5p Spanish Speakers Potluck

Thursday 17

- 7p Prairie Guys Group

Saturday 19

- 1p Prairie Game Group

Sunday 20

- 9:30a RE workshop
- 10a "My Journey to Gaza" by Tsela Barr
- 10a RE classes
- 11:30a Interweave
- 12p Prairie Leadership Forum

Tuesday 22

- 6:30p Prairie Board Meeting

Thursday 24

- 6p Prairie Evening Potluck

Sunday 27

- 10a "All Souls' Day" by Prairie
- 10a RE Halloween Party
- 11:30a Prairie Journey Circle

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

Wed 1-4pm and by appointment

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.



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President's Perspective

Ken Skog



3

If you have 20 minutes to spare off and on this September and October, you can make a difference in voter turnout on November 5th by writing letters through Vote Forward, an organization of volunteers who encourage fellow Americans to vote. Working in collaboration with groups like People for the American Way, League of Conservation Voters, National Resources Defense Council, and Indivisible, Vote Forward provides an easy way to help in voter outreach.

How it Works

Founded in 2017, Vote Forward has been conducting handwritten letter campaigns nationwide to mobilize underrepresented voters. Its approach is evidence-based, with randomized controlled trials showing that personal letters boost voter turnout. Since its inception, volunteers have written over 31 million letters, with a goal of writing 10 million more in 2024.

Different Types of Campaigns

Vote Forward offers several types of letter-writing campaigns. Current campaigns (grouped by state) are:

- **Social Campaigns:** These focus on mobilizing historically underrepresented groups, such as people of color and young voters.
- **Voter Registration Campaigns:** These campaigns aim to register voters, especially in states where voter registration deadlines are approaching or where new laws affect voter access.
- **Political Campaigns:** These campaigns focus on specific elections, such as U.S. Senate or House races.

Proven Impact

In Wisconsin's 2023 Supreme Court race, letters boosted turnout in Social Campaigns by 0.6 percentage points, although Political Campaigns showed a smaller effect. In Virginia's 2023 elections, "classic" letters (focused on encouraging turnout) were effective, boosting turnout by 0.5 to 0.9 percentage points.

continued on p 5



Rev. Ralph's Monthly Message

As we move closer to National Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 5th, let's review what is allowed for 501(c)3 organizations. As a religious organization, Prairie UU Society, is designated as 501(c)3.

The following was copied from <https://uuthevote.org>, the UUA's UU the Vote website. It lists all the ways that Prairie, as a congregation, can get involved in the election.

The UUA, UU congregations, and UU organizations can:

- Engage in issue advocacy and organizing for justice
- Conduct voter education
- Increase voter access through voter registration
- Conduct Get Out the Vote drives
- Combat voter suppression
- Support or oppose ballot initiatives
- Educate candidates on issues
- Sponsor candidate forums
- Prepare and distribute non-partisan voter guides
- Lobby elected officials
- Host a variety of activities at our congregations

The UUA, UU congregations, and UU organizations cannot:

- Have advocacy as their only activity
- Endorse or oppose candidates running for elected office
- Intervene in campaigns to influence the outcome of an election

Progressive people of faith can be powerful and prophetic without being partisan. We can engage our neighbors, educate our communities, mobilize voters, rally around ballot initiatives, and shape the public discourse with values-based framing, rooted in our theology and principles. Electoral cycles offer heightened opportunities to engage and inspire people, mobilize around key issues, and to strengthen democracy, and win real advances on key issues on the ballot.

continued on p 5

UU the VOTE



President's Perspective, cont.

5

How to Write Effective Letters

Vote Forward encourages volunteers to write positive, personal, and nonpartisan messages. Volunteers should highlight why voting is important to them personally. For example, you could share a story about how a recent political decision affected you or your community. These heartfelt messages are more likely to resonate with recipients and motivate them to vote.

Keep your message personal and avoid political jargon. Avoid shaming non-voters or focusing on civic duty. Focus on broader issues like healthcare, education, or the environment.

How to Sign Up and Start Writing

- Register: Create an account on <https://votefwd.org>. You'll need a printer, paper, #10 envelopes, and first-class stamps.
- Adopt Voters: After approval (which may take a couple of days), you can adopt voters in groups of five or twenty.
- Write Letters: Print the pre-formatted letters and add your personal message. Sign the letter with your first name and last initial.
- Send Them: Mail your letters as directed, immediately or closer to the election.

I find I can complete 5 letters ready to mail in 15-20 minutes. I'm currently working on a Voter Registration Campaign in Wisconsin. Vote Forward provides a meaningful way to get involved in getting voters to the polls.

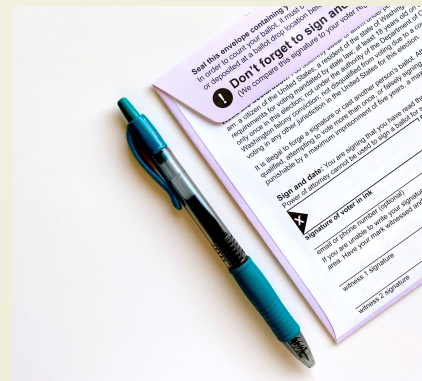


Photo by Tiffany Tertipes
on unsplash.com

Rev. Ralph's Message, cont.

Religious individuals and groups have played a prophetic role in public life throughout history by calling attention to oppression, demanding change, organizing for justice, and holding leaders and institutions accountable for their actions and policies. We have a moral responsibility and are fully within our legal bounds to be a voice in the public policy arena and a force in mobilizing communities to advance our values 365 days a year. When it comes to electoral engagement, we know there are common concerns and at times misunderstanding that require simple guidelines to help us move forward.

The UUA, UU congregations, and many UU organizations have tax exempt designation with the Internal Revenue Service known as 501(c)3 status. Being a 501(c)3 means that a nonprofit organization has been approved by the IRS as a tax-exempt, charitable organization. Charitable is broadly defined as being established for purposes that are religious, educational, charitable, scientific, literary and more.

What's Going on in Religious Exploration?

Karen Deaton, Director of Religious Exploration



RE Welcomes a Bumper Crop of Children

RE classes have begun! If you were at Prairie on our first day of RE (September 15), you might have counted 21 youngsters going forward for the Story for All Ages. I'm looking forward to a lively, vibrant RE year full of new friendships and learning.

You may have also noticed that many of those children are very young. We will need extra volunteers to help keep an eye on the youngest members of our community when attendance is high. This will be particularly true at Prairie's retreat - 23 children are registered! Only 4 of them are over 10 years old. As you can imagine, we need lots of eyes to keep track of all those youngsters, especially when we are engaged in outdoor activities. Please join in the all-ages activities when possible and let the leader know that you are willing to look after some of the children. Let's support all these young families by helping out and having fun together!



Photo by Leo Rivas on unsplash.com

How you can support RE:

- We're planning to hire an additional childcare worker or two. If you know somebody at least 14 years old who is good with little children, please send them my way!
- We'd like a comfy armchair for nursing parents to use.
- Prairie can use another sturdy high chair
- RE will accept donations of empty toilet paper tubes, board games, and puzzles.
- Check out the TV in the foyer to see recent pictures of RE activities.

continued on p 7

Religious Exploration, con't.

7

Happy Halloween!

On October 27, we invite children to come to Prairie in costume! Bring candy and trinkets to share with children in the foyer before the service, or just admire their costumes.

Downstairs in RE that day, we'll have a Halloween party. We'll have various stations for games and crafts. We'll also have a Halloween egg hunt - an oddball Prairie tradition where kids search the yard for eggs that have tickets in them - tickets that can be exchanged for prizes!

The service upstairs will be a remembrance of loved ones who have passed away. Some of you may prefer fun and games. Please let Karen know ([dre\[at\]uuprairie.org](mailto:dre[at]uuprairie.org)) if you might be willing to help out at the Halloween party.



Lynn tries to eat a donut without using her hands, demonstrating that adults have fun at the Halloween party, too!
Photo by Karen Deaton



A minion gathering Halloween eggs.
Photo by Karen Deaton

Prairie Seeks Half-Time Minister

Prairie Minister Search Committee

As a historically lay-led congregation, Prairie offers a shared ministry opportunity. We seek a kindhearted, thoughtful, and open-minded person to collaborate with us. Together we create a community supporting each other in the joys and concerns of our spirited and energetic membership. Details can be found on our website at <https://uuprairie.org/work-at-prairie>.

Prairie's Social Action

Pam Gates, Social Action Committee co-chair

8

A number of Prairie folks have stepped up to help with our monthly commitment to The River, the largest food pantry in Madison. The River serves 2,500 people every week(!) with prepared food or basic groceries. Our job is to make sandwiches and fill “munch bags” with snacks. Eight of us – usually six from Prairie and two from James Reeb, work from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. every first Saturday. Other volunteers load the food into the “Munch Truck” and staff deliver it to different lower-income neighborhoods in Madison on a predictable schedule. Thanks to Margit Moses for getting us started on this effort! We will be completing our second year in December.



Five Prairie members -- Rev. Ralph, Lynn Currie, Johanna Hatch, Karen Deaton, and myself -- started Nehemiah's “Black History for a New Day” course on Sept. 16. We listened to a recorded lecture, this first one by a UW professor of African American Studies. After the lecture, we participated in a small group discussion led by a moderator. Nehemiah's purpose with this course is to educate people in an area that was often neglected in our schooling and to build allies for the efforts of achieving racial justice and equity. Thank you to the Prairie board of directors for paying the tuition fees, a sign that Nehemiah's goals are also Prairie's goals.

MOSES (Madison Organizing in Strength, Equity, and Solidarity for criminal-legal system reform) – an organization of congregations of which Prairie is a member – has participated for the past year in efforts to end the lockdowns in several of our prisons. There have been some improvements in conditions of confinement but there have also been some prisoner deaths; much more needs to be done. A start would be to make use of the parole system and compassionate release for sick and elderly prisoners, to get people out who have served well beyond the time they were expected to serve and also well beyond their danger to society.

continued on p 9



Social Action, cont.

9

As part of a movement sponsored by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, we gather on the State Street Capitol steps on the 23rd of each month to draw attention to the 23 hours/day that prisoners in solitary confinement spend alone in a tiny cell. The UN has declared solitary confinement for more than fifteen days to be torture.

On Sept. 10, MOSES joined its parent group WISDOM and others in the State Capitol to launch a National Week of Action aimed at repealing the 1994 crime bill, a law that has significantly contributed to mass incarceration and mass supervision nationwide. “The time has come to address the harm caused by this bill and work toward new policies that promote healing and justice,” said WISDOM executive director David Liners. Ben Austen, author of *Correction: Parole, Prison, and the Possibility of Change*, spoke at First Unitarian Society on Sept. 17 to a nice-size crowd, at the invitation of its MOSES social justice group.

The “holiday cards for people in the Dane County Jail” project will happen again this year. Last year, joining a number of congregations around the city, Prairie members wrote cards to offer a cheering message to people incarcerated during the holidays. We’ve been invited to participate again and plan to do so.

Each quarter, we share half of our offertory donations with a local organization that works on homelessness. Thanks to all who donate during the offertory! This quarter we have been sharing with Heart Room, a collaboration involving The Road Home, Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ, and families that have been homeless. Next quarter we will share with Porchlight’s DIGS program, which provides housing-related emergency assistance to people in Dane County. This summer, as a longtime member of Allied Partners, we took up an emergency collection for the eviction-prevention program at Allied Drive.



Thank you to all who contribute in one way or another to Prairie’s social action. Our efforts support Principles 1 and 2: Respecting the inherent dignity of every person, and seeking justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.

Thank You!

Ken Skog, Prairie President

A big thank you to everyone who has contributed to Prairie's functioning for the past twelve months, Fall 2023 - Fall 2024. (Please pardon omissions & errors!)



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Staff - Rev Ralph Tyksinski, Minister; Nancy Wunderlin, Administrator; Karen Deaton, DRE; Raju Eliganti, Janitor; Amber, Accompanist; Ollie and Liam – Childcare

Nominating Committee - Heidi Hughes, Margit Moses, Barbara Chatterton Frye, Mary Frantz, Rachel Long (past Chair), Past: Paula Pachcairz

Archives - Dirk Herr-Hoyman (Chair), Rosemary Dorney, Barb Park, Bob Park, Susan Herr-Hoyman, Jason Deschard, Mary Mullen (past Chair)

Caring - Heidi Hughes (Chair), Barbara Chatterton Frye, Erin Bosch, Margit Moses, Aileen Nettelton, Suzanne Gernandt, Rev. Ralph Tyksinski

Finance - Chris Porter (Chair), Chris Unger, Gary Gates, Ken Skog, Suzanne Gernandt

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

Housing and Property - John Gernandt (Chair), Gary Gates, Heidi Hughes, Gene Kain, Al Nettleton, John Wunderlin, Ruth Ellen Saul, Randy Converse (past Chair)

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

Program - Renee Deschard (Chair), Barb Park, Robin Proud, Ann Sawyer, Karen Smith, Non-voting Members: Nancy Wunderlin, Ralph Tyksinski, Past: Andy Garst, Rick Ruecking, Sonya Sidkey

Music team - Nancy Wunderlin, Barb Park (Choir Director), Dan Proud, Carl Wacker (Accompanist)

Religious Exploration - Andrea Scott (Co-chair), Susan Herr-Hoyman (Co-chair), Karen Deaton (DRE), Marie Andrae, Carl Wacker

RE Teachers and Aides - Marie Andrae, Randy Converse, Lynn Currie, Renee Deschard, Jesse Garst, Gary Gates, Avalon Haykus, Dirk Herr-Hoyman, Susan Herr-Hoyman, Heidi Hughes, Alice Mandt, Paula Pachciarz, Chris Porter, Anne Pryor, Robin Proud, Renee Deschard, Andrea Scott, Tm Scott, Luna Small, Casey Steinau, Patty Stockdale, Rebecca Strome, Karleen Tyksinski, Carl Wacker, Matt Wise

AV and Tech - Marie Andrae, Renee Deschard, Andy Garst, Mary Mullen, Al Nettleton, Dan Proud, Harlan Small, Ralph Tyksinski, John Wunderlin, and Nancy Wunderlin

continued on p 11

Thank You, con't.

Soundboard & Zoom Tech -

Andy Garst, Harlan Small, Dan Proud, Nancy Wunderlin

Social Action - Pam Gates (Co-Chair), Chris Porter (Co-Chair), Molly Plunkett, Past: Paula Pachciarz, Katie Mulligan, Gary Gates

Prairie Fire Editor - Anne Pryor, Past: Pageen Manolis Small

Minister Search Committee

Susan Herr-Hoyman (Chair), Suzanne Gernandt, Molly Plunkett, Robin Proud, Tim Scott, Past: Johanna Hatch

Board of Trustees

Ken Skog, President; Renee Deschard, Vice President; Dan Proud, Secretary; Chris Unger, Treasurer; Molly Plunkett, Trustee; John Wunderlin, Trustee; Susan Herr-Hoyman, Trustee; Kathy Converse, Past President; Karen Deaton, Past Vice-President

Retreat Committee - Renee Deschard, Nancy Wunderlin, Marie Andrea, Past: Karen Deaton, Alice Mandt

Committee on Ministry - Paused pending the hire of a new minister K D Thompson (Chair), Barb Park, Anne Pryor

Transition Team - Work is completed Chris Unger (Chair), Molly Plunkett, Suzanne Gernandt, John Wunderlin, Susan Herr-Hoyman, Rev Ralph Tyksinski, Tim Scott, Ken Skog

Mission and Vision Team - Work is completed Ken Skog, Avalon Haykus, Randy Converse

Thank you also to everyone who presented a program on Sunday, donated an Auction item or purchased an Auction item, helped any Prairie Committee, organized or helped in any Prairie activity, made a pledge or other donation to Prairie, and any others who have helped make Prairie a caring community!

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