

Prairie Fire

December
2024



Photo by Zdeněk Macháček on unsplash.com

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Prairie Contacts

Ken Skog, President - [president\[at\]uuprairie.org](mailto:president[at]uuprairie.org)

Ralph Tyksinski, Pastoral Care - [revralph\[at\]uuprairie.org](mailto:revralph[at]uuprairie.org)

Karen Deaton, Director of Religious Exploration - [dre\[at\]uuprairie.org](mailto:dre[at]uuprairie.org)

Nancy Wunderlin, Administrator - [admin\[at\]uuprairie.org](mailto:admin[at]uuprairie.org)

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

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

December 2024 Calendar

Please see www.uuprairie.org for detailed descriptions.

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Sunday 1

- 10a "Citizen's Climate Lobby" by Ken Skog
- 10a RE Cook & Learn: Christmas
- 11:30a Potluck Sunday
- 12:30p Humanist Union - "Our Place in the Cosmos"

Saturday 7

- 10a Women of Wonder (WOW)

Sunday 8

- 10a "Embracing the Wealth of Our Religious Roots" by Avalon Haykus
- 10a RE classes, including OWL
- 11:30a PUPPS (Prairie UU Parents)
- 11:30a Visitor Orientation

Sunday 15

- 9:30a RE: Nifty Gifty
- 10a "Winter Solstice" by Karen Smith
- 11:30a Interweave

Tuesday 17

- 6:30p Prairie Board Meeting

Thursday 19

- 7p Prairie Guys Group

Saturday 21

- 1p Prairie Game Group

Sunday 22

- 10a Intergenerational Service & RE: Symbol Tree
- 11:30a Prairie Journey Circle

Wednesday 25

- 10a Holiday Potluck Brunch

Thursday 26

- 6p Prairie Evening Potluck

Sunday 29

- 10a "Toast, Boast, and Oath" by Rev. Ralph Tyksinski
- 10a RE: New Year Celebrations

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.



Photo by Stephen Piclaidis
on unsplash.com

President's Perspective

Ken Skog, Prairie President



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The Prairie Interweave group met on Sunday, Nov. 17 and we spoke about how to support transgender people whose rights are under threat. We discussed several ways Prairie may be a support. Our group is working on several suggestions to bring to Prairie. Our action is motivated by the view that everyone should be accepted and loved for who they are and not someone else's arbitrary categories. That acceptance and love do not need any further justification.

So, the remarks that follow about how incredibly different people can be on a biological level are offered as, "Isn't this fascinating?" What follows is a condensation of remarks posted by Rebecca R. Helms, a marine biologist at Georgetown University, previously at the University of North Carolina. I first found the remarks in a Facebook post, and being skeptical, I confirmed who she is. I also asked two AIs to check the scientific points made and provide supporting peer-reviewed articles. There were some quibbles that it oversimplifies some points. So here are Rebecca's remarks, shortened somewhat.



Photo by Rob Marshall on unsplash.com

Many people are discussing biological sex and gender right now. It's often presented as simple but let's explore the biological complexities.

You might think biological sex is determined by chromosomes: XX for female, XY for male. This is chromosomal sex but is it the same as biological sex?

The Y chromosome has a gene called SRY that activates male-associated genes during embryonic development. Having the SRY gene makes you "genetically male." But is this the sole determinant of biological sex?

Sometimes the SRY gene moves from the Y chromosome to an X chromosome. This means someone with an X chromosome and the SRY gene is physically male but chromosomally female. Conversely, someone with a Y chromosome missing the SRY gene is physically female but chromosomally male.

So, biological sex isn't solely determined by chromosomes. What about hormones?

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Photo by Meg on [unspash.com](https://unsplash.com)

President's Perspective cont.

Sex-related genes activate hormones in specific body areas. These hormones are received by cells throughout the body. Could this be the root of biological sex?

"Hormonal male" implies typical levels of male-associated hormones. However, some females have higher levels of "male" hormones than some males and vice versa. Additionally, during development, the body might not produce enough hormones corresponding to genetic sex, leading to a mismatch between genetic, chromosomal, hormonal, and physical sex.

Perhaps cells hold the answer. Cells have receptors that respond to sex hormones but sometimes these receptors don't function correctly. Ultimately, an individual can be genetically male or female, chromosomally male or female, hormonally male/female/non-binary, with cells that may or may not respond to hormones, resulting in a body that can be male/non-binary/female.

Biological sex is multifaceted. It's not always straightforward to pinpoint the absolute cause of biological sex.

While it's true that most people are either male or female, variations are more common than many realize. It's crucial to remember that biological sex is complex and can't be used to judge or discriminate against anyone.

Respect people's right to define their own identity. Biology is complicated; kindness and respect don't have to be.

What's Going on in Religious Exploration?

Karen Deaton, Director of Religious Exploration



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Religious Exploration Cook & Learn

The Hindu holiday Diwali, the Festival of Lights, was celebrated this year at the beginning of November in south Asia and throughout the diaspora. It celebrates the victory of good over evil, knowledge over ignorance, and light over darkness. Prairie's children learned about the holiday in our November Cook & Learn. Prairie's custodian Raju Eliganti told our students one of the many stories associated with Diwali. He also showed pictures of Diwali celebrations in India, brought images of Hindu deities to show, and led youth in cooking. Raju's a natural teacher!



RE students create a Diwali decoration called rangoli. Photo by Andrea Scott

Ann Sawyer's sister Caroline coordinated a visit from several guests from the [Shiva Vishnu Hindu Temple and Cultural Center](#) in Fitchburg. They brought sweets, decorations, and gifts! Divya demonstrated how to draw a lotus blossom rangoli to welcome guests (including the goddess Lakshmi) and invited the children to participate. Swati and her daughter lit diya lamps and told us about how they celebrate Diwali at home.

The RE students prepared coconut ladoos, flavored with cardamom or rose water, to share with the congregation and guests at our potluck.

Deepest thanks to our visitors and volunteer helpers who made this a very enriching morning!



Raju Eliganti tells a RE group about Diwali. Photo by Andrea Scott



RE students admire diya lamps decorating rangoli. Photo by Andrea Scott

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RE cont.

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How you can support RE in the weeks to come

- *Share Christmas memories*
Our next Cook & Learn day will be December 1 when we will explore Christmas with emphasis on the Christian bible story and traditions, rather than the many pagan traditions that have been folded into the season. Do you have a Nativity scene you might like to show the children? Do you have memories of Christmas celebrations in your childhood church (such as the Advent wreath, a candlelight service, or a Christmas pageant) to share? Contact Karen if you're interested in sharing.
- *Do childcare during PUUPs (Prairie UU Parents' group) meetings*
We need volunteers to join us for pizza after the service then look after children during the parents' discussion time from 12 to 1. You can play with children, teach a song, or do crafts! The next PUUPs meeting is December 8. Contact Karen if you want to learn more.
- *Do crafts or bring snacks for Nifty Gifty*
Nifty Gifty is our annual gift-crafting extravaganza, this year on December 15. We need volunteers to help kids that morning. We also need treats and snacks. Contact Karen to learn more.
- *Donate supplies for Nifty Gifty*
 - Dirty old paintbrushes, at least 1" wide (we won't be painting with them, so they can have any kind of paint or varnish on them)
 - Cocktail napkins with pretty images on them
 - Old Christmas cards to cut up

Bring these items to Prairie on Sunday or ask Karen to pick them up from you at home.

Check out the TV in the foyer to see more pictures of recent RE activities.



Photo by Sigmund on unsplash.com

Prairie's New Pastoral Minister: Welcome Mary Sue Reutebuch Anne Pryor, PrairieFire Editor

Meeting Mary Sue

On November 9-10, Prairie's Minister Search Committee introduced Prairie to their proposed minister candidate, Mary Sue Reutebuch. On Saturday, Mary Sue held Meet & Greet meetings with members of the Caring, Membership, RE, and Program Committees, as well as with Prairie's board and administrator. On Sunday morning, she gave the service, "Active Hope: A Post-election Journey." In the afternoon, she did more Meet & Greets with Prairie members and friends, as well as PUUPs.



On Tuesday, November 12, Prairie held a parish meeting to vote on the hiring of the proposed minister. Votes were accepted by proxy, Zoom, and direct attendance. The results were 71 yes votes, 0 no votes, and 3 abstentions. In return, Mary Sue accepted Prairie's offer of a half-time ministry and will serve January - December 2025.

As our board president Ken Skog wrote, "I am grateful for the strong support from our members, who, I believe, have deeply appreciated her enthusiasm and thoughtful kind message. I look forward to her contributions in pastoral care, engaging Sunday programs, and supporting our committees and activities." So say we all.

Prior to meeting Prairie members, Mary Sue provided this introduction to herself:

I was born and raised in Indiana. Although I considered studying and working in other parts of the country, the Midwest has always called my spirit.

I started my career in Montessori education. I earned a Montessori teaching credential and a bachelor's degree in communications/education. I had the privilege to serve as a classroom teacher, music teacher, principal, and consultant in the Montessori field. It was during those years that I experienced an awareness of the connectedness of all things and felt a call to explore theology and ministry. I went on to earn my masters degree in pastoral theology, and it was inspiring to see how Montessori education and theology connected.

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Pastoral Minister cont.

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The premise of the Montessori philosophy is that all children carry within themselves the person that they will become. In order to develop physical, intellectual, and spiritual potential to the fullest, the child must have freedom. It was through this truth that I met the Unitarian Universalist principles. I attended my first Unitarian Universalist services and was in awe of the open-mindedness of the sermons and how the members seemed to value aspects of all faiths without attachment to specific dogmas. Right away, I knew that the UU Church would be a beacon for me throughout my lifetime.

My husband Tim and I have recently moved to Madison from Whitewater. We have a wonderful son who recently graduated from DePaul University in Chicago and is now in Madison as well. Tim, Jeremy, and Jeremy's partner Zoë are the true gifts in my life.

Please know and trust that I am humbled and honored beyond words to serve the Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society. I will work beside you to continue to build a vibrant, radically welcoming spiritual home for all who seek it.

You also can explore Mary Sue's website at [Whole Child Parenting](#).

Congratulations and many thanks to the Minister Search Committee for such dedicated and excellent work to help Prairie secure a new minister: Chair Susan Herr-Hoyman, Molly Plunkett, Suzanne Gernandt, Robin Proud, and Tim Scott.



Mary Sue Reutebuch.
Photo by Mary Mullen

Prairie at The River

Molly Plunkett, Social Action Committee

The Social Action Committee continues its monthly project of packing lunches at The River Food Pantry on Madison's Northside. These lunches are distributed in parks during the summer and at libraries during the winter. We've been doing this for about 2 years.

Members from Prairie and James Reeb UU Congregation have combined for the project, which takes about 2.5 hours of steady sandwich assembly and bagging in teams of 2.

Some of the more regular Prairie folk include: Pam Gates, Deesa Pence, Gene Kain, Susan and Dirk Herr-Hoyman, Ruth Ellen Saul, Rev. Ralph and Karleen Tyksinski, and Chris Porter. Others who have participated include Andy Garst, Ken Skog, Allison Mix, Kate Mulligan, Margit Moses, Heidi Hughes, KD Thompson, Lynn Currie, and Molly Plunkett.

Reeb members who have given steady support to the project include: Peggy Haack, Alice Schumer-Johnson, Rand Hill, and Elaine Pridgen.

Thanks to everybody for this good work in the community!



L-R: Pam Gates, Allison Mix, Deesa Pence, Chris Porter, Peggy Haack, and Alice Shumer-Johnson. Photo by Molly Plunkett

Will History Repeat Itself?

How Prairie Members Helped an Immigrant Family in the 1980s

Mary Mullen, Archives Committee

As we face the probability that incoming President Trump will carry out mass deportations, here's a bit of history about another time when Prairie and some members supported immigrant families. This article features excerpts from pp. 467-469 of in Volume 1 of the Prairie history book set: "Prairie UU Society: 50 Years in the Life of a Congregation."

The Sanctuary Movement

Back in the 1980s when wars were ravaging Central America and people from those countries were fleeing violence, a sanctuary movement grew in Madison. At Sunday services in 1983, 1984, and 1986, Prairie learned about the issues and the movement. A church in downtown Madison served as an actual sanctuary and Prairie contributed to the various refugees who passed through. *[An omitted paragraph lists the services and people who presented them.]*

A bit more daring, at some point in the mid-1980s, Shirley and John Grindrod became good friends with a Guatemalan family who were housed, supported, and protected for 18 months by the "Second Site" sanctuary group in Madison. One of the Grindrod sons was married to the woman in charge of the family. In January 1985, the U.S. government started cracking down on sanctuary workers in the southern border states. Workers here in Madison were warned by their network to immediately move sanctuary families to safety. The "González" refugee family (mother, father, and 4 young children) was first taken to live with an elderly woman in her home outside of Madison, then to the St. Benedict Center, now Holy Wisdom Monastery. But they were basically trapped there and it seemed time to find them true sanctuary in Canada. As Jenny Beatty explains in her account, the Second Site group "assisted them to secure legal refugee status and



John Grindrod, a doctor, and Shirley Grindrod, a nurse, loaned their family camper so a Guatemalan family of 6 could be smuggled out of the U.S. to Canada. Photo, April 1986 at Devil's Lake by Ruth Calden.

History, cont.

asylum in Canada.” In reality, that meant that the Grindrods loaned out their family camper to their son and his wife to help transport the family surreptitiously out of the United States and “to their new home in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where they still live today as citizens of Canada.”

Currently, sanctuary is on our minds again, as undocumented immigrants are threatened by deportation by our national government under President Trump, who has vilified both Muslims and Mexicans. Statistics show that under President Obama, more undocumented immigrants were deported than during the terms of any other modern president, although one of the high points of his presidency was his executive action protecting “Dreamers,” young people brought to this country as children but without immigration papers. At its November 2017 Parish Meeting, Prairie members voted to support other sanctuary congregations although no one is actually in sanctuary at this time.



Photo by Nitiish Meena on [unspash.com](https://www.unspash.com)

In Wisconsin, immigrants – some undocumented – make up a good proportion of the hired help in agriculture and specifically in dairying. Newspaper articles describe how Latino families who have lived here for decades are in constant fear of deportation, regardless of how exemplary and hard-working they are. Prairie posts the “Standing on the Side of Love” yard sign on the property or in the lobby window to show support.

In Prairie’s neighborhood, it is safe to say that we have both documented and undocumented immigrants. The Marlborough Park Community Garden has been a sanctuary of sorts, first for Hmong and other southeast Asians who came to the United States after the Vietnam War and now for Latinos who make up about 2/3 of the 100 gardening families. Several families have asked Mary Mullen to write letters of recommendation as they apply to renew their immigration status. Individuals from families she knows sometimes hold 2 or 3 jobs, none high-paying.

Open Doors for Refugees is an organization that works with refugees, locating some in the Dunn’s Marsh neighborhood.

[Read details about the Guatemalan family that the Grindrods helped and about other actions by Prairie on the issue of immigration on pp. 470-473 in Volume 1 of the history set.]

December's Humanist Union

Beth Zurkowski, Humanist Union Program Organizer

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Everyone is invited to the next Humanist Union meeting on Sunday, December 1. We will join Prairie's monthly potluck in the Meeting House before heading to the Annex for the program in which John Wunderlin will present a discussion of astronomical scale and distance, followed by his journey into astrophotography. The title of the talk is "Our Place in the Cosmos."



Photo courtesy of John Wunderlin

John has been a lifelong space and science enthusiast and amateur astronomer. He founded the Iowa County Astronomers Club in 2006 along with his friend Dave Oesper. John does a lot of astronomy outreach and he estimates that more than one thousand people have looked through his telescopes over the years.

