

Prairie Fire



Photo by Aaron Burden on unsplash.com

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Prairie Contacts

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

January 2025 Calendar

Please see www.uuprairie.org for detailed descriptions.

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Saturday 4

- 10a Women of Wonder (WOW)

Sunday 5

- 10a "Elizabeth Cady Stanton: The Woman's Bible" by Robin Proud
- 10a RE Cook&Learn: Buddhist holiday Bodhi Day
- 11:30a Potluck Sunday
- 12p OWL Parent Meeting (ages 9-11)

Sunday 12

- 10a "Still Climbing the Justice Mountain: Lessons Not Yet Learned from MLK" by Mary Sue Reutebuch
- 10a RE Peer Group Classes & OWL
- 11:30a PUPPS (Prairie UU Parents)
- 11:30a Visitor Orientation

Wednesday 15

- 3p Prairie Board Meeting
- 5p Spanish Speakers' Potluck

Thursday 16

- 7p Prairie Guys Group

Saturday 18

- 1p Prairie Game Group

Sunday 19

- 10a Service by Rev. Ralph Tyksinski
- 10a RE Peer Group Classes & OWL
- 11:30a Interweave

Thursday 23

- 6p Prairie Evening Potluck

Saturday 25

- 2p Prairie Book Discussion Group

Sunday 26

- 10a "Who We Are - Just Bakery" by Greg Juarez
- 10a RE Peer Group Classes
- 11:30a Prairie's 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



Photo by Agê Barros on unsplash.com

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.

President's Perspective & Social Action

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Ken Skog, Prairie President
Pam Gates & Chris Porter, Social Action Committee Co-Chairs



Addressing Gun Violence in Schools

From Ken: On Monday, December 16, while riding in a car returning from Chicago, I received an email from Lisa Presley of the UUA MidAmerica Region. She asked if they could assist in response to the school shooting in Madison. For a moment, I was filled with apprehension, wondering if the shooting could have been at one of my granddaughters' schools. When I learned it was at Abundant Life Christian School, I felt relief for my family but anguish for the victims and their community. I thought, *Next time, it could endanger my granddaughters. What can I do to make a difference in Madison?* National and state gun control legislation is critical but progress seems stalled. Communities need immediate action.

The Prairie Social Action Committee has been actively supporting homeless people, including organizing groups of Prairie members to prepare food at the River Food Pantry one Saturday each month in partnership with members of James Reeb. Could we also identify a regular activity that addresses the root causes of gun violence?

Research from sources such as Harvard Medical School, the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, and the CDC highlights key factors contributing to gun violence in schools:

- **Socioeconomic hardship:** Poverty, low income, and lack of education create environments where violence is more likely.
- **Access to firearms:** Easy access for high-risk individuals significantly increases the likelihood of gun violence.
- **Exposure to violence:** Witnessing or experiencing violence, including domestic violence, makes violent behavior more likely.
- **Mental health:** Although not a primary cause, psychological factors like aggression and impulsivity can increase the risk of violence.
- **School climate:** Negative environments, including bullying and lack of support, can contribute to violent incidents.

From Pam and Chris: Do you know of local organizations that Prairie members and friends could partner with to address one or more of the risk factors listed by Ken? For example, could we collaborate with groups working to reduce exposure to violence? How might Prairie convene members and friends who are interested in recurring support for a chosen organization? Please send your suggestions to Pam at [pml.gts\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:pml.gts@gmail.com). Working together, we can perhaps have some effect on this tragic problem.

Suggestions Welcome!

Pam Gates & Chris Porter, Social Action Cmt Co-Chairs

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As some of you know, our commitment to The River Food Pantry ended in December because The River is ending its Munch Truck food delivery on Saturdays. Monday-Friday food prep and delivery still will take place.

We thought this opportunity at The River was especially valuable because it gave Prairie, and eventually Reeb, a chance to work together in a group on a regular basis while doing something helpful for the larger community, something that, as Ken points out on the previous page, could be indirectly helpful in preventing gun violence.

So, we are looking for another such opportunity: a recurring group project to which we can make a monthly commitment for at least one year. *We might* be able to fit into The River's weekday food prep efforts; we would like to know if there is interest in that. What about other ideas? As Ken suggests, identifying a regular activity that addresses the root causes of gun violence would be excellent. Any ideas out there? Let us know! **social-action[at]juuprairie.org**

Second Baptist Holiday Fest

Rev. Ralph Tysinski

Everyone enjoyed the food and fellowship that Prairie and Second Baptist Church members shared at their Holiday Fest on Saturday, December 14.



Pastor Anthony, Karleen Tyksinski, Rev. Ralph

What's Going on in Religious Exploration?

Karen Deaton, Director of Religious Exploration



Cook&Learn

The Christian holiday of Christmas was the topic of Cook&Learn in December. Children explored the Bible's Nativity story, either through a Playmobil toy reenactment or by reading the story in the graphic novel, *Action Bible*. To share at our potluck, one crew of youngsters made gingerbread and others made Christmas sugar cookies.

Holiday activities

December 15 was a day of happy crafting activity downstairs - Nifty Gifty! Thanks to our crafting elves who led projects and handled the glue guns: Jesse Garst, Suzanne Gernandt, Heidi Hughes, Paula Pachciarz, Chris Porter, Robin Proud, Andrea Scott, and Casey Steinau. Thanks also to other helpers including Deesa Pence, Carl Wacker, and Liam Creed, and to all who donated supplies!

Coming up this winter

- OWL for ages 9 to 11
- Preparations for a multi-age play to be performed on March 9
- Cook&Learn about Bodhi Day, Lunar New Year, and Ramadan
- Age-group classes



Nifty Gifty photo by Andrea Scott

How you can help our RE program

- *Volunteer!* Once a month is all it takes; are you willing to be part of a teaching team? Will you play with children during the Prairie UU Parents' group (PUUPs) meetings? Will you help with cooking or reading stories on Cook&Learn days? Talk to me!
- Take time to chat with children and get to know them, especially at our potlucks.
- Play peek-a-boo with little ones in the service or smile and wave to them.

As I write this, I'm looking forward to our Solstice bonfire and the intergenerational Symbol Tree Service this weekend. **Joyous holidays to all!**



Nifty Gifty photo by Andrea Scott

Rev. Ralph's Reflection

Rev. Ralph Tyksinski, Prairie Minister

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Dear members and friends of Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society,

A heartfelt "Thank You!" It has been a privilege and honor having served as Pastoral Care Minister these past eighteen months. I will be passing the torch to Mary Sue Reutebuch at the end of January. Karleen and I will continue to be members. Mary Sue and I will be sharing in a Covenant that defines our roles as she begins her service on January 1. We will overlap during January.

The following words are from the Covenant that we will be sharing that explicitly states my new relationship with the congregation and with Mary Sue:

The Retiring Minister (Ralph Tyksinski, hereafter RM) has served Prairie UU Society for the past eighteen months (8/2023 – 2/2025) and previously (9/2005 – 6/2010), and will continue to live in Madison with his spouse for the foreseeable future. Both will continue their membership in the congregation. Both will continue to sing in the choir. We recognize that he knows many congregants well and will remain in the consciousness of those and other members and friends. We recognize that this situation could impact the ministry of Mary Sue Reutebuch (hereafter Succeeding Minister, SM). We also recognize that RM's experience represents a special resource for SM. We both want the congregation to have a successful ministry now and in the future. We promise to work together to this end as follows: All of the duties of the RM now rest with SM. RM has no duties, responsibilities, nor privileges, per se, thru the calendar year 2025.

It is my hope and continuing expectation that the congregation will support and partner with the professional ministry of Mary Sue as she embarks on her service as Prairie's Pastoral Care Minister.



Photo by Ihor Malyskyi on unsplash.com

Fall Parish Meeting

Dan Proud, Secretary

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President Ken Skog called to order the annual Fall Parish Meeting at 10:22 a.m. on Sunday, November 24. This was a hybrid meeting with 49 members physically present and nine more present via remote transmission.

Highlights of the meeting included approval of the 2025 budget. Our pledge drive is nearly over and we have raised almost \$148,000. An amendment earmarked \$20,000 in spending reserves to be made available. The budget was unanimously approved.

Ken drew attention to a motion printed on the back of the Sunday bulletin. After some discussion, the motion was made with amendments that the Board establish a committee to study and make recommendations on the purposes, use, and investment of Prairie's financial reserves, with the composition of the committee at the discretion of the Board. Discussions would include the possibility of establishing an endowment. The motion carried overwhelmingly.

A slate of candidates for the Committee on Ministry was approved, with Avalon Haykus and Johanna Hatch joining Anne Pryor.

Committee reports were approved, with corrections to the Archives Committee report. The full committee reports are recorded on the 2024 Prairie Parish Meeting Materials under the For Current Members page on the Prairie website. They are also included in this issue of *Prairie Fire*.



Prairie's Work through Allied Partners

Molly Plunkett, Social Action Committee

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Here is some information about the Allied Food Pantry taken from their December newsletter. Prairie helps to support this effort through our participation in Allied Partners.

Households served in 2024 to date: 4,389 households with 690 new and unique households. 225,498 pounds of food distributed. This is triple what it was last year.

Changes in 2025: Due to the ending of Dane Cares funding to Second Harvest, costs for eggs, milk, and meat will significantly increase in 2025, increasing our 2025 budget demands by 100 percent.

Survey results:

From a survey taken of 89 clients: 99% surveyed stated that the Allied Food Pantry met their food needs, allowed them to make cultural dishes, allowed them to eat more fruits and vegetables, and would benefit from even more fresh produce.

Supporters and Donors in 2024 include the Good Shepherd Foundation, Allied Partners, Allied Wellness Center, Second Harvest Foodbank, City of Madison Seed Grant, City of Fitchburg Healthy Neighborhood Grant, Boy Scouts, Boys and Girls Club, Fitchburg Police Department, Madison West DECA, Epic Systems, many faith communities, and very generous individuals.

Volunteers! 40 plus strong, ages 8-80 years. Volunteers include neighborhood residents, UW-Madison students, members of Allied Partners faith communities, and all-around awesome people. We are ordering, greeting, cleaning, stocking, shopping, lifting, and serving.

What do we need?

Food: Donations of rice, dry beans, pasta, ramen, cooking oil, white flour, corn flour, couscous, tomato sauce, cereal, and spices.

Essentials: toilet paper, hand soap, diapers

Upcoming event: Food Is Medicine Event, January 18, 2025. All are welcome. We are working with residents and our community partners to offer this exciting learning opportunity and multicultural potluck dinner. For details, contact Molly.



2024 Fall Parish Meeting Committee Reports

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Archives Committee

Chair: Dirk Herr-Hoyman

Members: Mary Mullen, Barb Park, Bob Park, Rosemary Dorney, Jason Deschard, Susan Herr-Hoyman

This committee maintains the history of Prairie in several forms and places: the two-volume *Prairie UU Society: 50 Years in the Life of a Congregation* (copies are still available), online at archive.uuprairie.org, in Google Drive folders, and at the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS).

New Work:

- Moving paper materials from the Prairie offices into either digital form via scanning or more permanent storage at WHS. We are much of the way through these materials (orders of service, newspaper clippings, etc.) and hope to be through all of them in 2025.
- Created a spreadsheet of committee members and chairs by year going back to 2013. One use is for the Nominating Committee to see who has been a committee chair. This is stored on Google Drive.
- Created a spreadsheet of Prairie members going back to 1967. This includes updates for deaths. This is stored on Google Drive.
- Created a spreadsheet of poetry by Prairie members going back to 1970. This is stored on Google Drive.
- Scanned newspaper clippings about Prairie members from 1970 to 1993. This is stored on Google Drive.
- Extracted audio from old cassette tapes. These files are stored online at archive.uuprairie.org.

Ongoing Work:

- Send materials to WHS (board minutes, etc.)
- Save OOS (order of service) for recent services to archive.uuprairie.org
- Save audio of recent services from Zoom recordings to archive.uuprairie.org

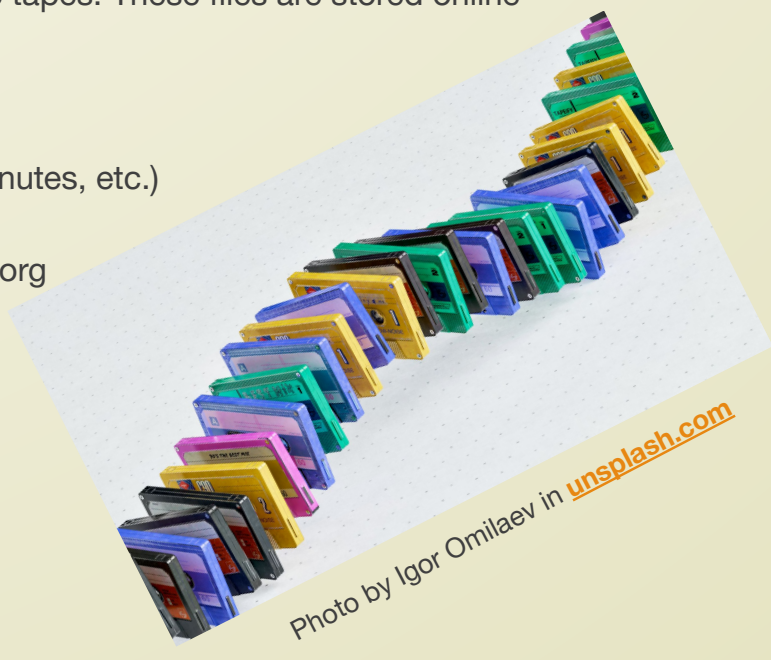


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Caring Committee

Chair: Heidi Hughes

Members: Erin Bosch, Aileen Nettleton, Barbara Chatterton, Suzanne Gernandt, Margit Moses, Susanne Oliver, Reverend Ralph Tyksinski

Activities

Since our last parish meeting on May 19, 2024, the Caring Committee has been continuing to provide attention to our specific caring groups and other members as needed. 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 October, 15, 2024 and welcomed a new member to our committee, Susanne Oliver! She is new to Prairie and felt that the Caring Committee best fit her set of skills and interests. She graciously accepted several newer members into her newly created caring group. We routinely discuss members in our caring groups that have reached out and needed some help. We shared ways to support members, including anticipating upcoming needs, and then divided recent new members into caring groups. As a group, we are in good email contact, sharing information about care needs of members as they arise.

Accomplishments

- It was so important I had to list it as an accomplishment also; Susanne Oliver joined the Caring Committee!
- Erin Bosch wrote a recent article for *Prairie Fire*, reviewing what the Caring Committee does for existing members and especially for new members that have joined recently.
- Recording meeting notes and eventually getting them in a shared Google Drive (this has not happened yet but will be forthcoming).
- Contacting our caring groups at least annually, letting everyone know we are here to help!

Supporting Our Mission/Vision Statements

We continue to respect the diversity of our members and families and their needs as related to our committee. Privacy is always respected. 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 in connecting with each other to divide care duties as they develop.

Caring Committee cont.

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Reverend Ralph Tyksinski continues to be an incredible asset to this committee by providing needed pastoral care for those members who request it. He has planned and offered the congregation a Grief Support Group which will meet on five consecutive Wednesdays, starting on October 23. This helps our community both deepen our caring connections and continue to learn and grow individually and with each other.

Finance Committee

Chair: Chris Porter

Members: Chris Unger (Prairie Treasurer), Suzanne Gernandt, Gary Gates

Current Financial Status

- Prairie's finances remain strong. Income and expenses for 2024 are on track.
- We received a \$25,000 donation from the Loucks family this year but decisions on its use are pending.

Endowment Fund Consideration

- Prairie is exploring the possibility of establishing an endowment fund, which is separate from the Loucks gift. We are weighing the advantages and disadvantages of this option; discussions are ongoing.

Financial Overview as of October 31

- Prairie has \$318,000 in the bank, an increase from \$259,000 on the same date last year.
- We hold five certificates of deposit (CDs), each starting with a \$25,000 deposit. The remainder of our funds is mostly in a money market account. The checking account balance is primarily to cover one month's expenses.

Pledge Update for 2025

- Our pledge goal is \$158,000. This goal includes the potential use of \$10,000 from reserves if necessary. As of November 8, we have received 45 pledges totaling \$116,500. We expect to receive around 15 more. While I'm hopeful we will get near our goal, realistically I think we will reach \$148,000, which may entail using up to \$20,000 in reserves.
- Total budgeted expenses for 2025 are \$205,000. If we do not meet our pledge goal, we may seek permission to use additional reserves. Historically, we have managed to avoid using reserves except for two instances when funds were specifically allocated for a full-time minister.

Finance Committee cont.

Debt Situation:

- Prairie has a loan of \$8,000 from First UU, which is only payable if Prairie UU Society dissolves. The meeting house and annex are owned outright without any debt.

Hospitality Committee

Chair: Ruth Ellen Saul

Members: Barbara Chatterton, Lynn Currie, Evan Fisher, Paula Pachciarz, Rick Ruecking, Patty Stockdale, Chris Unger, Nancy Wunderlin, and frequent spontaneous volunteers whenever there's a mess to clean up

Activities

- Coffee service provided before and after Sunday choir practice and Sunday services
- Monthly Sunday potluck coordination, execution, and cleanup
- Hospitality participation in Prairie events such as a joint service with other congregations or providing coffee supplies to groups meeting at Prairie facilities
- Coordination with Maintenance Committee to keep kitchen operations functioning well

Concerns/Suggestions/Future Goals: keep the coffee flowing!

Housing and Property Committee

Chair: John Gernandt

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

Gardening Subcommittee: Karen Deaton, chair

Aesthetics Subcommittee (maintains the Prairie UU "ambiance"): Heidi Hughes, Barbara Chatterton

Our expenses are within the annual budget.

Since July of 2024, the committee has completed the following:

- Concrete infill at the front of the building
- Repaired HVAC
- Repaired sofas for RE
- Purchased new leaf blower

- Repaired string trimmer
- Painted curb for handicapped parking, including signage
- Purchased new refrigerator
- Purchased new ladder for the main building

Future Projects

- Pressure wash the stucco exterior of the main building
- Redesign landscaping surrounding the sign to provide more visibility from the street
- Tree trimming
- Continue to investigate refinishing the concrete at the front of the building



Photo by Karolina Grabowska on unsplash.com

Membership Committee

Chairs: Deesa Pence and Patty Stockdale

Members: Judy Lazarus, Paula Pachciarz

By the numbers:

Prairie members as of November 2024: 105

Members from last parish meeting May 2024: 101

New or rejoined members in 2024 to date: 12

Members who resigned or became friends: 9

Members who passed away: 0

Activities and Accomplishments

- Greet at every Sunday service - Two or more Membership Committee members greet attendees on Sunday mornings. We answer questions from visitors and direct attendees to the meeting room. We introduce new families to the DRE.
- Conduct monthly Visitor Orientations - Two to four 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 one hour, given the available time of the visitors.

Membership Committee cont.

- Sponsor monthly Circle Potlucks - 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 which is typically formed in the late summer or early fall.
- Conduct New Member Orientations and New Member Recognitions as needed - Prairie welcomed the following folks as new members so far in 2024: Karissa Truan, Tuppence Van de Vaarst, Josh Spotts, Dawn Regenbogen, Cindy McCallister, Alison Mix, Susanne Oliver, Donald Bachman, Sue Ellerhorst, and Steve Puntillo. Returning members are Beth Butler and Margaret Carpenter. Rev Ralph Tyksinski has implemented modifications to the New Member Recognition by broadening the welcoming experience to include words from our minister, Prairie's President, and RE Chair or Director.
- 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 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 for members and friends in our database Breeze. Also, a paper Membership Directory was published in August 2024 and up to 30 were distributed to those who preferred a printed copy.
- Email members and friends to let people know how to stay informed via PrairieNews, PrairieViews, *UUWorld*, the Interest and Talent Survey, and *Prairie Fire*. Typically we send out this email around the time the *UUWorld* is sent to members. The UUA sends the *UUWorld* out twice a year.
- Update the visitor tracking spreadsheet for weekly visitors who complete Visitor Forms. The Membership Committee sends welcoming emails to visitors the week after the Sunday they attend and invites them to upcoming Visitor Orientations, Potluck Sundays, Sunday services, and other events on the horizon. Prairie's administrator

Membership Committee cont.

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created a new email address **Welcome2Prairie[at]juuprairie.org**. We think this is more welcoming than the Membership Committee 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. We are hoping to modify the existing wooden sign by raising it to allow a "yard sign" to go underneath to face both Crawford and Whenona streets. Raising the wooden sign may require the prairie yard to be trimmed back to improve visibility. The wooden sign and the "yard sign" beneath would then become the only signs in the church yard.
- Bought pronoun pins. The Membership Committee purchased pronoun pins. In 2025, we will be purchasing Prairie t-shirts.
- Organized Circle Dinner groups. Nine circle dinner groups were formed by mid-September 2024 with a total of 51 participants. They included five to six per group which is small to encourage groups to invite the 23 folks on the alternates list. Some alternates are also in dinner groups. The total number of participants is 70, about 2/3 of the membership.
- Endeavor to keep newer and long-time members connected to and involved with Prairie by reaching out by calling or emailing them.
- Create name tags. Judy Lazarus has been meeting with Metje Butler who is a wonderful artist and name tag maker.

Concern

The website needs refreshing and updating. It has been serving the church for five 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.

We welcome new participants to our Membership Committee

Nominating Committee

Chair: Heidi Hughes

Members: Margit Moses, Barbara Chatterton and Mary Frantz

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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 three 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.

As of the last report written for the Spring parish meeting, we had recruited all Board members and new Nominating Committee members, except for one, the president. Then, Ken Skog graciously volunteered to be our president! Hooray! Thank you so much, Ken!

Paula Pachciarz completed her second two-year term this May and Rachel Long stepped down because she moved to California. Both these members contributed a considerable amount of time to organizing this committee: Paula, with recording the history of who was on this committee in the past, so we could better recruit new members and Rachel with writing and organizing many documents to help guide how this committee functions, which definitely is on a timeline. All of these documents are accessible in a shared Google Drive for the Nominating Committee that Rachel continued to organize, which I believe was started by Kent Wenger. Thank you all who have done this work to build the foundation, which will make it easier for us to go forward. We so appreciate you!

Nominating Committee cont.

A new part-time minister will be coming! That means we need to have the Committee on Ministry coming back into the fold again. We will start recruiting for this committee immediately because these nominees for the Committee on Ministry need to be affirmed by a congregational vote at the Fall parish meeting. More details about this to come.

We also will be sending out a skills and interests survey again starting in January. This helps us and other members of committees to know who likes to do what. Your responses are very helpful for committees to find people who may be interested in and can help with the work they do. We will kindly ask all to complete these for the first time, or if they haven't done this the last time it was requested in May 2024, and/or if your interests/skills may have changed.

In January 2025, we will start assessing what positions on the Board and Nominating Committee will be at the end of their terms. This creates vacancies for new people to step into, thus new opportunities to contribute your skills or try new things, get to know other members better and do the work that has kept this special community together for the past fifty-plus years.

Program Committee

Chair: Renee Deschard

Voting Members: Barb Park, Robin Proud, Ann Sawyer, Karen Smith, Karen Deaton

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

(thank you to Pageen Small, Andy Garst, and Sonya Sidky for their Program Committee contributions)

Activities/Accomplishments

A huge thank you to all of our Prairie presiders, presenters, coordinators, readers, program assistants, musicians, tech & Zoom helpers, greeters and hospitality people who make our Sunday services so wonderful!

Prairie had our long-standing collaborative service on the fourth Sunday in July with The Free Congregation of Sauk County. The Program Committee & Music Committee worked closely with Reeb and First to organize the August 4 collaborative service at Warner Park.

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. Jim Foti, Vicar Vica-Etta Henrietta Steel, and Rev. Dr. Michael Schuler. Prairie's own Aaron Robert (Kate Liu's son) returned and gave the talk, "The Past, Present, and Future Labor Movement" on September 1. November 3 was a Badger Talk: "Decolonizing Spirituality" by Nandi (Sunita) Nandihalli. (We have two presentations annually as part of the Badger Talk program.) Sunday services also included local non-profit organizations, area speakers, and our own Prairie members.

Information

Regarding the increase of the Program Committee's 2025 budget, it was created thinking we'd have a halftime minister for half the year. If we have a halftime minister before then, then the speaker expenses will be less. Note that two speaker checks for January 2024 were written/came out of the 2023 budget.

During some Sunday services, we've had committee chairs talk about their committees (what they do, who is on their committee, etc.). So far in 2024, we've had: Hospitality, AV & Tech, Membership, and Archives. This came from a suggestion at a previous Leadership Forum.

Just Bakery will be returning on a quarterly basis to sell bakery goods at Sunday services. They will be at Prairie on January 26 and will also speak about the program on that date.

Per policies and procedures, the services should end at 11:15am. This is what RE has planned for and all the volunteers have planned for as well. Since September, we've had more attendance (yeah!) but have been going over time with discussion and Joys and Concerns. We've added additional language into our Presider script and talked with Presiders on how to keep to the time: "Please share one item and keep comments brief so everyone can share who would like to." If this continues to be an issue, then Program will investigate having people write down joys/concerns as larger congregations do.

Concerns/Suggestions/Future Goals

Please feel free to email program@juuprairie.org if you have a concern, suggestion, or suggested speaker.

We sent out a program survey in March and had 32 responses. The Program Committee went through the suggestions.

Program Committee cont.

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Implemented

- Add Mission & Vision in our Orders of Service when space permits.
- Option for sharing joy/concerns with the congregation without having to get up and speak. We added wording/announced at services that now people can write on the back of the announcement slips which are on the hymnal cart.

In Progress/On Hold

- Let the kids vote on one of the year's share the plate organizations (and have them talk about it at those services). The Social Action Committee had already selected next year's partners. Program sent this suggestion to the RE Committee.
- Increase the length of silent meditation and offer words of invitation prior to ringing the chime. Prairie has affirmed that it enjoys a wide variety of people who preside. Although the Presider script asks for the Presider to count to 45 seconds, there are those who do a shorter meditation. Program will look into buying a one-minute sand timer to have at the podium. We have added a sentence to offer words of invitation for the meditation.
- Musical Sunday with people performing and everyone singing, maybe mixed with reflections/poetry. Please contact the Program Committee if you would like to organize this service.
- Pick one or two hymns that we know well and include them frequently. We do have a few we sing often, i.e. "Spirit of Life," "Blue Boat Home," and "Morning Has Broken." The Music Committee will continue to try to balance familiar ones with an occasional less familiar one.

Not Doing At This Time

- Introduce elements of responsive readings or litanies or unison affirmations. Although we occasionally have a responsive reading as part of the service, there are no plans to add additional service elements. According to Program policies, the program should end at 11:15am. Adding responsive readings or additional elements would mean needing to remove other elements such as songs or the story for all ages.
- Consider publishing the Zoom recordings. Zoom recordings are emailed to Prairie News and available to view for several weeks. The audio of the presentation is available on our Members' page indefinitely,

Program Committee cont.

providing that the presenter has given permission. Given the storage, cost, and permission requirements, there are no plans for indefinitely saving the full Zoom service recordings.

Music Committee (Program Sub-committee)

Members: Nancy Wunderlin, Dan Proud, Barb Park (Choir Director)

Activities/Accomplishments/Information

In July, our choir director Barb Park attended the Association for Unitarian Universalist Music Ministries (AUUMM) annual conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. While there, she learned more about the UUA's new virtual hymnal project. Prairie was accepted as a beta tester for the hymnal app and will be exploring the features.

Our choir celebrated the end of the season with a fun picnic in June. After a summer break, rehearsals resumed in September. We are happy to report that our choir has over 20 members and continues to grow, with new voices joining regularly.

In addition to our choir, this summer and fall Prairie enjoyed performances that included ukulele, viola, natural horn, guitar, voice (including duets), recorder, drums, tambourine, harmonica, saxophone, and piano. Please reach out to anyone on the committee if you are interested in participating in music performances at Prairie.

AV and Tech Committee (Program Sub-committee)

Chair: John Wunderlin

Members: Marie Andrae, Al Nettleton

Activities/Accomplishments/Information

We continue to refine the procedures for technology and Zoom tech for Sunday services. It has been running pretty smoothly, as has our recently upgraded internet and wifi network. The only update since the last report is the acquisition of a permanent small table for the Zoom technician, which is larger and matches the wood of the soundboard station.

We are always looking for volunteers to help run the sound board and Zoom systems. Please let John Wunderlin know if this is something of interest.

Religious Exploration (RE) Committee

Chairs: Susan Herr-Hoyman and Andrea Keyser

Members: Marie Andrae; Carl Wacker; Renee Deschard, liaison with Program Committee; Karen Deaton, Director of Religious Exploration, Matt Wise (?)

Summer Activities

Outdoor activities filled the summer menu. A family weekend at the Friendship Center brought food, fun, and fellowship together. A picnic and swimming were the main activities at Gov. Dodge State Park on Saturday, with S'mores served up in the evening. Other good times included making ice cream (or milkshakes) in a bag, tie-dying shirts and socks (as well as the backyard), bubble play, visiting a splash pad, and a hike with a picnic at Picnic Point. An inter-generational field trip to the zoo offered a time for folks of all ages to hang out.

The numbers of children showing up seems to be creeping upward. It's a great addition to Prairie but it also calls us to require more hands in order to provide a quality RE program that is both safe and fun.

Fall Return

We were pleasantly surprised on the Sunday of gathering for a new year. Over 20 children showed up. They will surely keep us on our toes! Many of those children and their families attended the retreat as well. It is all a welcome addition to Prairie!

Staffing and Volunteers

We have hired a new child care provider. Betty Astin started this fall. She is a welcome addition as Ollie is not as available as before. We also are seeking a Lead Teacher to coordinate programming and support Sunday morning RE staff and volunteers. More volunteers are always welcome!

Spending

Our budget remains within our request for the 2024 year. Expenditures by July were at 51%.



Governor Dodge State Park

Retreat Committee

Members: Marie Andrae, Renee Deschard, Nancy Wunderlin

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Activities/Accomplishments

We had beautiful weather on September 27-29 at Bethel Horizons and record attendance (54 adults and 20 kids)! The 2025 retreat will again be at Bethel on September 26-28. Thank you to the planners, activity leaders, and everyone who helped out.

Budget

The retreat goal is to break even and we try to keep pricing close to Bethel's. It is difficult to know how many donations we will receive and scholarships will be requested. Prairie paid for: one environmental education program with live animals in the Nature Center, childcare workers on Saturday, and three scholarships.

Retreat Income: \$10,071; Retreat Expense: \$8,741.00 (note: minus \$1,000 deposit)

Concerns/suggestions/future goals

With record levels of youth attending, retreat planners and RE will continue to work closely together and gather family input on how best to meet everyone's wants safely at the 2025 retreat. Feedback was positive on meeting in the Prairie Center's Dining Room and going as a group to an activity.

Survey results

We had 18 responses to a short post-retreat survey. The retreat planners met and went through responses. We will pass some items on to Bethel (such as more grab bars in bathrooms) but many are unfortunately out of our control (i.e. menu items served were different from what was selected). Note that there are only two ADA accessible rooms in the Prairie Center - #1 and #9. Please write in next year's registration form that you want one of those rooms, if needed.



Photo by Levi Guzman on unsplash.com

Social Action Committee

Chairs: Pam Gates, Chris Porter

Members: Molly Plunkett, Katie Mulligan

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Activities/Accomplishments/Information

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 Pam Gates – are participating in Nehemiah’s “Black History for a New Day” course Sept. 16 - Nov. 18. Each week, we listen to a recorded lecture by a UW professor of African American Studies; after the lecture we participate in a small group discussion led by a moderator. Nehemiah’s purpose with this course is to educate people, particularly whites, in an area that was often neglected in our schooling and to build allies for the efforts to achieve 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) is an organization of congregations of which Prairie is a member. MOSES 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 also have been some prisoner deaths; much more needs to be done. A start would be to make use of the parole system and of compassionate release for sick and elderly prisoners, to get people out who have served well beyond the time they were expected to serve, and release for those who are well beyond their danger to society.



Photo by Aaron Doucett on unsplash.com

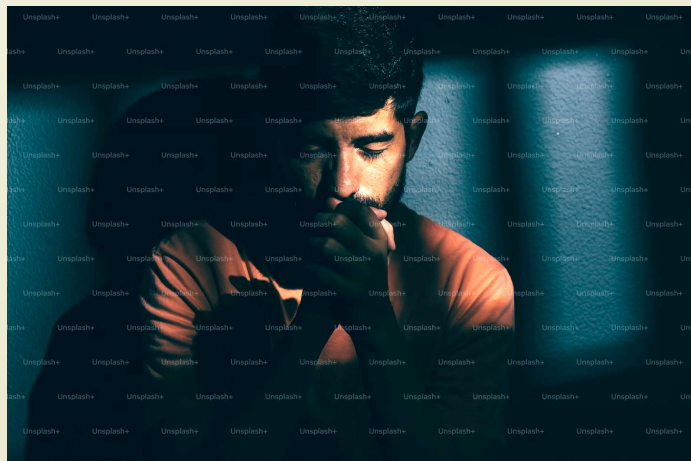
Social Action Committee cont.

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 U.N. has declared solitary confinement for more than 15 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,” said WISDOM executive director David Liners, “to address the harm caused by this bill and work toward new policies that promote healing and justice.” 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. Pam has been invited to join that FUS group, which recently renamed itself the Criminal Justice Reform team. She plans to do so, increasing collaboration between our local UU congregations.

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 participate by donating during the offertory! This quarter we share with Porchlight’s DIGS program which provides housing-related emergency assistance to people in Dane County. Each quarter we share with a different local agency.



Minister's Report to Congregation

Rev. Ralph Tyksinski

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Since the May 19 Spring parish meeting, I have continued to support the Caring Committee and its referrals of Prairie members for pastoral care. I have especially directed care to those who have experienced a special loss in their lives.

I have provided pastoral counseling to Prairie members who have experienced marital difficulties. I also have provided hospital visitations to Prairie members experiencing serious health issues and rehab care.

I have continued supporting the Program Committee by providing:

- 5/12 "Flower Ceremony," coordinated with the Prairie Guys Group serving a Mother's Day pancake brunch.
- 5/26 Joint service with Second Baptist Church commemorating the First Memorial Day in 1865 by African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina. I co-led the service with Rev. Anthony Wade and we had combined choirs. Feedback has recommended that Prairie continues finding ways for both congregations to share joint endeavors.
- 7/7 "Thomas Jefferson: His Religious Beliefs"
- 7/28 "Making Love Visible," joint service with Free Congregation of Sauk County
- 8/4 Joint service with First Unitarian Society and James Reeb UU Congregation at Warner Park
- 8/25 "Christian Nationalism: What Is It and How Does It Shape Our Religious and Cultural Landscape?"
- 10/6 "Autumnal Lessons Through Poets' Eyes"
- 11/17 "A House Divided – Whither Thou Goest?"

Beginning on Wednesday, October 23, I began an Adult Exploration Program for Prairie members around issues of grieving and loss. This was a four-session workshop that explored: managing grief; losses that can cause grief; coping skills that address loss and grieving; and exploring the signs and symptoms associated with acute grief, complicated grief, normal grief, and anticipatory grief.

It has been my deep honor to serve as quarter-time Pastoral Care Minister.