

Prairie Fire

February
2025



Photo by Marc-Olivier Jodoin on unsplash.com

Table of Contents

2	Calendar	6	What's Going on in RE?
2	Staff Office Hours	7	Social Action
3	President's Perspective	8	Skills and Interests Survey
4	Pastoral Minister	9	Andy Somers
5	Rev. Ralph	11	Dean Schroeder
		13	Madison Area Jail Ministry

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

February 2025 Calendar

Please see www.uuprairie.org for detailed descriptions.

2

Saturday 1

- 10a Women of Wonder (WOW)

Sunday 2

- 10a "Raging Grannies" by Barb Park, Karen Deaton, and the Raging Grannies
- 10a RE Cook&Learn - Muslim Holidays Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr
- 11:30a Potluck Sunday

Sunday 9

- 10a "The Power of Promise" by Dr. Hassimi Traore & Mary Sue Reutebuch
- 10a RE Peer Group Classes
- 11:30a PUPPS (Prairie UU Parents)
- 11:30a Visitor Orientation

Saturday 15

- 1p Prairie Game Group
- 2p Prairie Book Discussion Group

Sunday 16

- 10a "Exploring Love Languages" by Mary Sue Reutebuch
- 10a RE Peer Group Classes
- 11:30a Interweave

Thursday 20

- 6p Prairie Guys Group

Sunday 23

- 10a "Engaging Our Theological Diversity" by Avalon Haykus
- 10a RE Peer Group Classes
- 11:30a Prairie's Journey Circle
- 12p Prairie Leadership Forum

Thursday 27

- 6p Prairie Evening Potluck

Office Hours

Pastoral Minister, Mary Sue Reutebuch

Most Tues and Thurs or by appointment

Administrator Nancy Wunderlin

Sun-Tue: on site in the Annex

Wed-Fri: working remotely

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.

President's Perspective

Ken Skog, Prairie President



3

This past Sunday evening, I attended a meeting of the Madison Insight Meditation Group. After our meditation session, a member presented a talk on the fifth precept. The five precepts serve as teachings or trainings to guide daily living, rather than rigid rules. The fifth precept is traditionally expressed as: *abstain from intoxicants that cloud the mind*, referring to the avoidance of alcohol or mind-altering drugs. However, our speaker suggested a broader interpretation: a commitment to cultivating discernment and care regarding what we consume, both physically and mentally.

She provided several examples of applying this discernment. For the body, it could involve limiting the intake of sugar-laden foods, alcohol, or mind-altering substances. For the mind, it might mean reducing exposure to social media, addictive apps, overstimulating television, or infotainment-style news designed more to provoke than to inform. We discussed whether consuming excessive amounts of news could similarly cloud the mind.

One member proposed a guideline: avoid consuming news that offers little benefit in helping us assist those closest to us—our families and our community. Instead, he prioritizes staying informed about local news, where he feels he has the greatest potential to respond meaningfully, whether by aiding individuals, addressing needs, or advocating for policy changes.

If this approach to news consumption resonates with you, Prairie offers programs and activities that focus on supporting our immediate Prairie community and local organizations addressing needs in the Madison area. Prairie provides opportunities to learn about and engage in local social justice initiatives. We all have the opportunity to be mindful of the news we consume and the issues we choose to focus on and work toward.

Of course, after reflecting on the ideas above, I found myself listening to national news about the troubling first-day actions of the new administration. While being mindful of the news we consume is important, it doesn't mean ignoring critical information. We need to stay informed enough to recognize when collective action is required to protect those most vulnerable, no matter where they are.

Photo by Sean on unsplash.com



Ministry Moments Shared

Mary Sue Reutebuch, Pastoral Minister



A chilly January bike ride with Tim!

Thank you all for the warm welcome! Your kindness is a testament to Prairie's dedication to inclusion and UU values. Also, thank you for your trust in me; it is a gift I deeply value.

Rev. Ralph and I have been meeting as he prepares to entrust pastoral care to me. I am grateful for his wisdom and guidance. What a treasure to know he and Karleen will still be with us.

At this time, I am planning to be at the Annex most Tuesdays and Thursdays; my hours may fluctuate. However, please make sure to contact me as needs dictate. I can be reached by email at minister@juuprairie.org or my cell phone, 608-931-9844.

On a different note, this morning I was feeling overwhelmed with the reality of the new leadership in our country. I, like many, have been asking how to keep the spirit of hope alive. The struggle is real.

I was then reminded of a beautiful parable, The Two Wolves, often attributed to a Native American origin. You may be familiar with its wisdom. It is good counsel for me and I pass it along to you as well.

A young man said to his grandfather, "I have a fight going on in me. It's taking place between two wolves. One is cynical, fearful, superior, and judgmental. The other is open, hopeful, courageous, humble, and empathetic."

The grandfather reassured his grandson that most people have these battles within them. At last, the boy looked up at his grandfather and asked, "Which wolf will win?"

The grandfather gave a simple reply, "The one you feed."

Please remember, together we will face what's ahead with our UU principles and values as our guiding light.

Rev. Ralph's Reflection

Rev. Ralph Tyksinski

5

The passing of long-time members, Andy Somers and Dean Schroeder, has brought grieving and sadness to our congregational life. The tributes to Andy by his children and grandchildren at his memorial service on January 4 were a beautiful testimony to the loving and enduring impact he had on their lives. The attendance at the service was overflowing in our meeting room, another powerful reminder of how much Andy affected the lives of so many.



Prairie choir performing at First Society for Dean Schroeder's memorial service. Photo by Rev. Ralph

The memorial service for Dean had to be held at First Unitarian Society, January 19, with an outpouring of family and friends filling the Atrium Auditorium. The tributes to Dean by Eric, Katrina, and Orange, and by the "Guys," Dean's running, riding, and walking buddies, were profoundly heartfelt and authentically expressed the many ways that Dean influenced their lives. Music played, especially by Handel, highlighted the special place it had in Dean's life. The beautiful and moving hymn, "Common Ground," with music and lyrics by Dean, was performed by the Prairie choir. (Prairie has another song of Dean's pasted inside the back cover of our grey hymnals too, "The Prairie Bond of Union Song," a lasting memorial to Dean's cherished life.

Knowing Andy and Dean, visiting with them in their final days, and participating in their services has been a deeply gratifying part of my final month of serving Prairie as your minister. They will be missed!

I step away and Mary Sue will continue serving as your pastoral care minister.

Appreciatively yours,
Rev. Ralph

What's Going on in Religious Exploration?

Karen Deaton, Director of Religious Exploration



Cook&Learn

Some people in the world celebrate Bodhi Day in January. Prairie children learned about Buddhism on January 5 with a story about the Buddha's life, practicing mindfulness, and preparing food to share at our potluck. Younger students made a fruit salad – vegetarian to honor the Buddhist idea of harming no living beings. Older students made rice pudding – the Buddha is said to have eaten rice cooked in milk while he sat beneath the Bodhi Tree and meditated. Thanks to Dirk, KD, Tim, and Dan for their help.

On February 2, Prairie students will learn about Islam, including Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr. *Please let me know if you have friends who might like to share their experiences as Muslims or as people who have lived in majority-Muslim communities.*

Peer Group Classes

- Children age 6 months to 4 years play together with our childcare workers
- Children 5 & 6 are learning about transformation with their teachers Carl, Avalon, and Randy
- Young people age 7 and up are either gaming with Tim or working on a play with Andrea and Robin. On some Sundays, 4th-6th graders have Our Whole Lives (OWL) classes with Karen, Matt, and Casey. Check the calendar on our website for current information

Biblical-Looking Costumes Needed!

Prairie's young people are putting together a play based on the story of the Good Samaritan. It will be performed on March 9. They need costume materials. Can you donate old bathrobes, sheets, pillowcases, shawls, belts, sandals, etc? Solid colors or stripes are preferred. If you happen to have a donkey costume or fake beard, those would be very welcome! Just bring your donation to Prairie and drop it off in the RE donation box in the foyer.



Prairie youth in 2014 take a bow after performing a play under the direction of Robin Proud. Photo by Karen Deaton

Social Action Committee Seeks “River” Replacement

7

Pam Gates, Social Action Committee Co-Chair

The Social Action Committee has been seeking a replacement for our 2-year Saturday morning group service at The River Food Pantry. Here are some possible options:

1. Badger Prairie Needs Network, Verona
Community meals, approximately 10am-1pm on first Saturdays. Help prep, serve, share, and clean up.
2. Luke House, Ingersoll Street in Madison
Once/month lunch or supper meal prep, sharing, and cleanup. 2-3 hours, 10am-1pm or 4pm-7pm (approximately)
3. St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, Spruce Street in Madison
5th Friday community meals (all the other Fridays already have teams to serve and clean up). Approximately 10:30am-1pm
4. The River Food Pantry on Madison’s Northside
2-4 hour daytime slots every weekday.
5. Allied Food Pantry, inside the Boys and Girls Club in the Allied Dunn’s Marsh Neighborhood
10am-12pm on Wednesdays. Not sure if they have room for a group to serve.

If any of these particularly attract you, please let me know. I hesitate to commit us until I know that we have a good core group who will plan to volunteer at least a few times/year. We worked with Reeb volunteers at The River and the Reeb coordinator agrees that it would be nice to continue our partnership.

Thank you, Prairie!



Photo by Emy on unsplash.com

Skills and Interests Survey

Margit Moses, Nominating Committee

8

Three years ago, the Nominating Committee created a Skills and Interests Survey for Prairie's members and friends. Your responses have been very helpful for committees to use to find people who are interested in and can help with the work they do.

In 2024, we updated the survey, adding questions that we thought would help us better understand how you could help Prairie to grow, and how Prairie could help you to grow! We are using that 2024 survey again this year.

We are asking all of our members and friends to fill out the survey with your current interests. Here is the link for the Skills and Interests Survey:

<https://prairie.breezechms.com/form/8a9b4533>

Please let one of the Nominating Committee members know if you have any questions: Heidi Hughes, Barbara Chatterton, and Margit Moses.



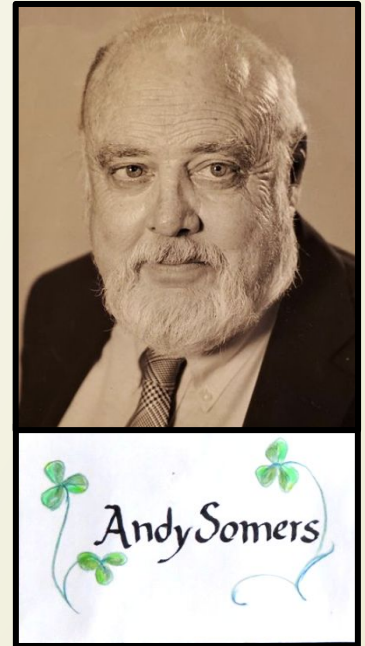
Enjoy this half melted snow face made in the Park's front yard by a granddaughter visiting from California in late December. Photo by Bob Park

Remembering Andy Somers

Mary Mullen, Archives Committee

9

Longtime Prairie member, Andy Somers, one of our East Coasters, passed away on Christmas Eve, 2024. He was 88. He had been a member since the spring of 2001 and left his mark not only at Prairie and here in Madison, but particularly in Ireland where he worked on justice issues with the people of Northern Ireland. His official obituary details some of that work as well as his local activities on the the Madison Police and Fire Commission Board, as a Madison alder, as an actor with the Madison Theatre Guild, and as a Fitchburg Municipal Judge (for 14 years), as well as his love of music and, of course, his family. He had a great sense of humor.



At Prairie, he occasionally gave a Sunday morning service. Even before he was a member, he had been invited to speak at Prairie. In mid-1996 he spoke on Northern Ireland and in 1998 he gave another presentation on human rights work in Ireland. After he joined Prairie, he did a Sunday service in May 2004, "Give Me Your Tired...But Not Yet," clearly a service on immigrants. Later that year Andy was Prairie's representative to speak at the traditional joint service between Prairie and the Free Congregation of Sauk County where the topic was "Social Concerns in an Election Year." George Bush and Dick Cheney were elected that November. Then in 2007 Andy organized a 3-service lay ministry on propaganda. He gave the overview in January and then invited two other activists, Lea Zeldin and Brian Standing, to make the additional presentations. As a followup to the lay ministry, Andy spoke to the Humanist Union, which meets at Prairie monthly. Other topics on Sunday mornings were: "Sex, Religion, Politics, and the Law" (mid-2007), "First Amendment – Right or Slogan" (April 2009), and "Putting Your Life in Action" (with his wife Mary in 2012). In 2015 he again made a presentation to the Humanist Union: "Ireland: A Terrible Beauty Is Born." Andy was on Prairie's Social Action Committee 2003-2006 at least, and he and Mary participated in Playreaders, the Spanish Speakers' Potluck, and the Prairie Book Club.

Andy put his thespian talents to work several times at Prairie. For example, in both 2007 and 2008, he was was one of the readers of Dylan Thomas' *A Child's Christmas in Wales*. Other readers at these moving pre-Christmas services were Rev. Ralph Tyksinski, Al Nettleton, and Warren Hagstrom (d. 2017). Andy even wrote and directed a musical theater piece to kick off the 2008 Prairie pledge

Andy Somers cont.

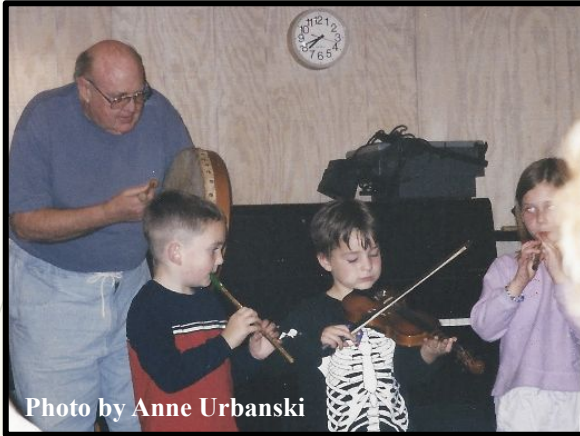
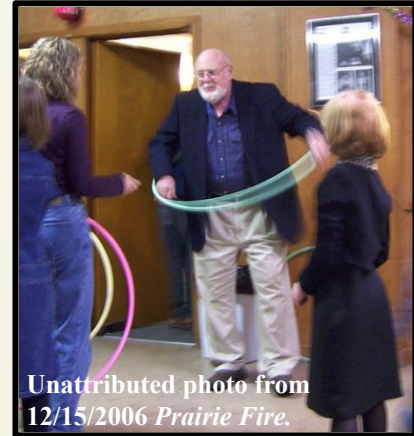


Photo by Anne Urbanski



Unattributed photo from
12/15/2006 *Prairie Fire*.

campaign. Based on the story of Scrooge in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, it was called, "Oh, Scrooge, Can You Spare Us a Pledge?" You can read the script on pp. 548-551 of the *Prairie* history book set. Many *Prairie* members participated in that production, either as soloists or in the choir. Andy was Marley, the business partner of Scrooge, who was played by Al Nettleton. Mary Somers was Mrs. Finance and Kate Liu played Mrs. Treasurer. These were the real-life positions of Mary and Erin at *Prairie*. Andy's final role was at Oakwood in *The Phantom of a Soap Opera* about a month before his death.

Andy loved music and his family. He sometimes played his trumpet as special music for a *Prairie* service. The photo provided above shows him playing the Irish bodhran at Bethel Horizons around 2002 or 2003 while his grandchildren play tin whistles and violin. On his Facebook page, you can see and hear him sing "Oh Danny Boy" during his stay at Oakwood. Another picture here shows the fun side of Andy as he tries to keep a hula hoop going at his 70th birthday party at *Prairie* in December 2006. Note the wood-paneled meeting room which gave way to the current white walls during the latest remodeling that was completed in 2021.

I'll always remember Andy as one of the friendliest people around, whether at *Prairie* or when I would drop into his and Mary's condo down by Dunn's Marsh.

You can read his obituary at

<https://www.cressfuneralservice.com/obituaries/andrew-somers-jr.>

Remembering Dean Schroeder

Mary Mullen, Archives Committee

11

These days, only a handful of members can say they've been around for anything close to fifty years, but Dean Schroeder, who passed away on December 28, 2024 after a long fight with cancer, got close. He and his wife Carol "Orange" Schroeder joined Prairie on February 15, 1976! They learned about Prairie when it was located on West Lawn Avenue about a block from their home. The Young Shakespeare Players Playhouse occupies that building now.

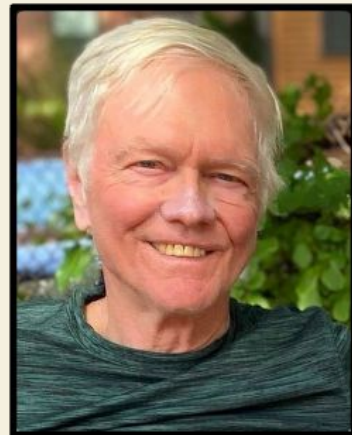


Photo from Dean's obituary

Dean had been a very active member during the entire time of his membership. Newer members would have seen him in the choir and also in smaller musical ensembles. The last time he performed was November 3 when he and Ron Frye led us in singing, "Come, Come, Whoever You Are." When Prairie welcomed new members most recently, the congregation sang "The Prairie Bond of Union Song." Dean wrote those lyrics in 2016 to sing to the tune of "Fairiest Lord Jesus." It's found pasted in the back of the gray hymnals so we will periodically be reminded of Dean's talents. Dean wrote music specifically for the choir. Since he composed the words and music for "Common Ground" in 1995, it has been performed by the choir at least 5 times as well as at his memorial service on January 19, 2025. Many of us will remember best the karaoke nights that he and Orange offered at their home as a service auction item.



Here is Dean singing with Patty Stockdale on February 11, 2017 at one of the service auction karaoke parties he and Orange hosted at their home. Often 8 or 10 participants gathered for a night of singing and snacking. Dean ran the karaoke machine and took part in the singing.

But Dean was more than music over the years. He was one of the workhorses of the congregation, filling many different roles with grace. Shortly after he joined Prairie, he chaired the Social Action Committee (1976-77). Quite a bit later he became Religious Education Committee Chair (1992-95), having already been a Sunday School teacher for at least 3 years. One of the youth who responded to a survey for the Prairie history book fondly recalled "Dean Schroeder's breakfast eggs" served at Fall Frolics, Wild Winterings, or Spring Flings, which were RE overnights at Prairie. (Note: until 2012, committee chairs also served on the Prairie board.)

Dean Schroeder cont.



Dean, far right, singing with the choir at Warren Hagstrom's music program on Mozart, December 14, 2003. Other singers shown are Warren Hagstrom, Dan Proud, Bob Park, and Rosemarie Lester. Photo by Carl Wacker.

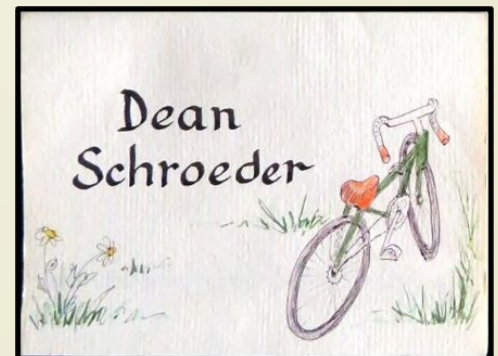
Dean served several terms on what used to be called the Committee on Committees (now the Nominating Committee) – 1995-96, 1998-99, and 2003-05. In 1997-99, Dean was board Vice President. Next, he took a turn as co-chair and then chair of the Program Committee (2000-2002). Then he took a shift as Secretary (2004-05). After that he chaired the Caring Committee for an even longer time, 6 years (2006-2010), and served on the committee for more years including 2015-2020. Members of that committee each have a list of Prairie members assigned to them to help in times of need. I'm sure he was excellent at that because he was always such a gentle and caring person.

Other recent committee work occurred in 2009-2010 when he co-chaired the Committee on Ministry with Ken Skog.

Outside of Prairie, many of us knew he was an avid biker. His two name tags, created by Metje Butler, highlight his love of biking. At his memorial service, both of his children, Erik and Katrina, spoke of biking with him as did "The Guys," seven of his male biking friends. The Guys noted how he turned them into lovers of Handel's music as well as talking with them about serious life issues.

A refrain from a song Dean wrote for Prairie youth sums up his philosophy of life. Called "Your Gifts," it was first performed on May 24, 1998 during the Transitions program honoring children graduating from 8th grade and high school.

Every act of kindness
 Any small compassion
 Every time you treat someone with care
 Never will be wasted
 Always will be cherished
 When you shine your light on them
 Others will reflect your love
 We receive the gifts that we have shared.



Dean was age 75 when he died. You can read his obituary at <https://www.cressfuneralservice.com/obituaries/dean-schroeder>.

Social Action

13

Pam Gates, Social Action Committee Co-Chair

On November 10, 2024, Prairie members took part in social action project - writing cheering messages on holiday cards to people who must spend their holidays in the Dane County Jail. The project is under the auspices of the Madison Area Jail Ministry (MAJM) and a good number of area congregations participated. This is a thank you from that project's ministers.



thank you

*Happy New Year
from MAJM*

Thank you to our partner congregations and each person in those congregations who took time to write a note to express that your thoughts and prayers are with our justice involved siblings this Christmas season.

On December 23rd, we donned our elf hat and reindeer ears and distributed Christmas cards at the Dane Co. Jail. As we entered each pod, we announced that we were there to distribute cards and, some quickly, some more hesitantly, came forward. Each resident expressed gratitude or a Merry Christmas as they received their cards. For those who were sleeping, other residents accepted extra cards from us and got to play the role of Santa's helper for others in their community. We had enough cards this year to be able to distribute two to each resident.

In the midst of distribution, we had the opportunity to check in with those seeking prayer, as well. One resident expressed that he was experiencing grief over loved ones lost during this time of year and depressed about being in jail and being alone for Christmas. When asked if there was more we could do to support him, he responded, "You've already done enough, just being here and talking to us. Thank you."

Christ came to us as a baby. He was born in lowly circumstances "...because there was no place for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7b) and he continued to show up to those in lowly circumstances. Those that were outcast. Those that were suffering. Those in need of healing. He continues to show up in our suffering, as well, and has called us to do the same. You have responded. With your kind wishes, you let the residents know that they are being thought of, that they are being prayed for, that they are loved. You let them know that they are not alone, but a part of the Body of Christ.

Thank you for your support, for your kind wishes, and for your continued prayers.

Chaplains Todd & Laura